PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 67

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1984-85

COMPRISING PERIOD
6 NOVEMBER—16 NOVEMBER 1984

LONDON
HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE
£40·95 net

ISBN 0 10 681067 7

Chronology of "The Parliamentary Debates"

The Parliamentary History contains all that can be collected of the Legislative History of this country from the Conquest to the close of the XVIIIth Century (1803), 36 vols. The chief sources whence these Debates are derived are the Constitutional History, 24 vols.; Sir Simonds D'Ewes' Journal; Debates of the Commons in 1620 and 1621; Chandler and Timberland's Debates, 22 vols.; Grey's Debates of the Commons, from 1667 to 1694, 10 vols.; Almons Debates, 24 vols.; Debrett's Debates, 63 vols.; The Hardwicke Papers; Debates in Parliament by Dr. Johnson, &c. &c.

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Blackburn, John Graham (Dudley West)
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Campbell-Savours, Dale Norman (Workington)
Canavan, Dennis Andrew (Falkirk, West)
Carlile, Alexander Charles (Montgomery)
Carlisle, John Russell (North Luton)
Carlisle, Kenneth Melville (Lincoln)
Carlisle, Rt. Hon. Mark, QC (Warrington, South)
Carter-Jones, Lewis (Eccles)
Carttiss, Michael Reginald Harry (Great Yarmouth)
Cartwright, John Cameron (Woolwich)
Cash, Mr. William (Stafford) [*By-election, May 1984*]
Chalker, Mrs. Lynda (Wallasey)
Channon, Rt. Hon. Henry Paul Guinness (Southend,

West)
Chapman, Sydney Brookes (Chipping Barnet)
Chope Christopher Robert (Southampton, Itchen)
Churchill, Winston Spencer (Davyhulme)
Clark, Alan Kenneth McKenzie (Plymouth, Sutton)
Clark, David George (South Shields)
Clark, Michael (Rochford)
Clark, Sir William Gibson (Croydon, South)
Clarke, Rt. Hon. Kenneth Harry, QC (Rushcliffe)
Clarke, Thomas C.B.E. (Monklands, West)
Clay, Robert Alan (Sunderland, North)
Clegg, Sir Walter (Wyre)
Clwyd, Mrs. Ann (Cynon Valley) [*By-election, May 1984*]
Cockeram, Eric Paul (Ludlow)
Cocks, Rt. Hon. Michael Francis Lovell (Bristol, South)
Cohen, Harry Michael (Leyton)
Coleman, Donald Richard CBE (Neath)
Colvin, Michael Keith Beale (Romsey and Waterside)
Concannon, Rt. Hon. John Dennis (Mansfield)
Conlan, Bernard (Gateshead, East)
Conway, Derek Leslie (Shrewsbury and Atcham)
Cook, Francis (Stockton, North)
Cook, Robert Finlayson (Livingston)
Coombs, Simon Christopher (Swindon)
Cope, John Ambrose (Northavon)
Corbett, Robin (Birmingham, Erdington)
Corbyn, Jeremy Bernard (Islington, North)
Cormack, Patrick Thomas (South Staffordshire)
Corrie, John Alexander (Cunninghame, North)
Couchman, James Randall (Gillingham)
Cowans, Harry Lowes (Tyne Bridge)
Cox, Thomas Michael (Tooting)
Craigen, James Mark (Glasgow Maryhill)
Cranborne, Viscount Robert Michael Thomas Cecil (South Dorset)
Critchley, Julian Michael Gordon (Aldershot)
Crouch, David Lance (Canterbury)
Crowther, Joseph Stanley (Rotherham)
Cunliffe, Lawrence Francis (Leigh)
Cunningham, John Anderson (Copeland)
Currie, Mrs. Edwina (South Derbyshire)

D

Dalyell, Tam (Linlithgow)
Davies, Rt. Hon. David John Denzil (Llanelli)
Davies, Ronald (Caerphilly)
Davis, Terence Anthony Gordon (Birmingham, Hodge Hill)
Deakins, Eric Petro (Walthamstow)
Dean, Arthur Paul (Woodspring)
Dewar, Donald Campbell (Glasgow, Garscadden)
Dickens, Geoffrey Kenneth (Littleborough and Saddleworth)
Dicks, Terence Patrick (Hayes and Harlington)
Dixon, Donald (Jarrow)
Dobson, Frank Gordon (Holborn and St. Pancras)
Dormand, John Donkin (Easington)
Dorrell, Stephen James (Loughborough)
Douglas, Richard Giles (Dunfermline, West)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James Alexander (Edinburgh, West)
Dover, Denshore Ronald (Chorley)
Dubs, Alfred (Battersea)
du Cann, Rt. Hon. Edward Dillon Lott (Taunton)
Duffy, Albert Edward Patrick (Sheffield, Attercliffe)
Dunn, Robert John (Dartford)
Dunwoody, Mrs. Gwyneth Patricia (Crewe and Nantwich)
Durant, Robert Anthony Bevis (Reading, West)
Dykes, Hugh John (Harrow, East)

E

Eadie, Alexander, BEM (Midlothian)
Eastham, Kenneth (Manchester, Blackley)
Edwards, Robert (Wolverhampton, South-East)
Edwards, Rt. Hon. Roger Nicholas (Pembroke)
Eggar, Timothy John Crommelin (Enfield, North)
Ellis, Raymond Joseph (North-East Derbyshire)
Emery, Sir Peter Frank Hannibal (Honiton)
Evans, Ioan Lyonel (Cynon Valley) [*died February 1984*]
Evans, John (St. Helens, North)
Evennett, David Anthony (Erith and Crayford)
Ewing, Harry (Falkirk, East)
Eyre, Sir Reginald Edwin (Birmingham, Hall Green)

F

Fairbairn, Nicholas Hardwick, QC (Perth and Kinross)
Fallon, Michael Cather (Darlington)
Farr, Sir John Arnold (Harborough)
Fatchett, Derek John (Leeds, Central)
Faulds, Andrew Matthew William (Warley, East)
Favell, Anthony Rowland (Stockport)
Fenner, Mrs. Peggy Edith (Medway)
Field, Frank (Birkenhead)
Fields, Terry (Liverpool, Broadgreen)
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey, MBE (Hampstead and Highgate)
Fisher, Mark (Stoke-on-Trent, Central)
Flannery, Martin Henry (Sheffield, Hillsborough)
Fletcher, Alexander Macpherson (Edinburgh, Central)
Fookes, Miss Janet Evelyn (Plymouth, Drake)
Foot, Rt. Hon. Michael Mackintosh (Blaenau Gwent)
Forman, Francis Nigel (Carshalton and Wallington)
Forrester, John Stuart (Stoke-on-Trent, North)
Forsyth, Michael Bruce (Stirling)
Forsythe, Clifford (South Antrim)
Forth, Eric (Mid-Worcestershire)
Foster, Derek (Bishop Auckland)
Foulkes, George (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
Fowler, Rt. Hon. Peter Norman (Sutton Coldfield)
Fox, John Marcus, MBE (Shipley)
Franks, Cecil Simon (Barrow and Furness)
Fraser, Rt. Hon. Sir Hugh Charles Patrick Joseph, MBE (Stafford) [*died March 1984*]
Fraser, John Denis (Norwood)
Fraser, Peter Lovat, QC (Angus, East)
Freeman, Roger Norman (Kettering)
Freeson, Rt. Hon. Reginald (Brent, East)
Freud, Clement Raphael (North-East Cambridgeshire)
Fry, Peter Derek (Wellingborough)

G

Gale, Roger James (North Thanet)
Galley, Roy (Halifax)
Gardiner, George Arthur (Reigate)
Gardner, Sir Edward Lucas, QC (Fylde)
Garel-Jones, William Armand Thomas Tristan (Watford)
Garrett, William Edward (Wallsend)
George, Bruce Thomas (Walsall, South)

Gilbert, Rt. Hon. John William (Dudley, East)
Gilmour, Rt. Hon. Sir Ian Hedworth John Little, Bt. (Chesham and Amersham)
Glyn, Dr. Alan, ERD (Windsor and Maidenhead)
Godman, Norman Anthony (Greenock and Port Glasgow)
Golding, John (Newcastle-under-Lyme)
Goodhart, Sir Philip Carter (Beckenham)
Goodlad, Alastair Robertson (Eddisbury)
Gorst, John Michael (Hendon, North)
Gould, Bryan Charles (Dagenham)
Gourlay, Harry Philip Heggie (Kirkcaldy)
Gow, Ian Reginald Edward, TD (Eastbourne)
Gower, Sir Herbert Raymond (Vale of Glamorgan)
Grant, Sir John Anthony (South West Cambridge)
Greenway, Harry (Ealing, North)
Gregory, Conal Robert (York)
Griffiths, Eldon Wylie (Bury St. Edmunds)
Griffiths, Peter Harry Steve (Portsmouth, North)
Grist, Ian (Cardiff, Central)
Ground, Reginald Patrick, QC (Feltham and Heston)
Grylls, William Michael John (North West Surrey)
Gummer, John Selwyn (Suffolk Coastal)

H

Hamilton, Archibald Gavin (Epsom and Ewell)
Hamilton, James, CBE (Motherwell, North)
Hamilton, Mostyn Neil (Tatton)
Hamilton, William Winter (Central Fife)
Hampson, Dr. Keith (Leeds, North-West)
Hancock, Michael (Portsmouth, South) [*By-election, June 1984*]
Hanley, Jeremy James (Richmond and Barnes)
Hannam, John Gordon (Exeter)
Hardy, Peter (Wentworth)
Hargreaves, Joseph Kenneth (Hyndburn)
Harman, Ms. Harriet (Peckham)
Harris, David Anthony (St. Ives)
Harrison, Rt. Hon. Walter (Wakefield)
Hart, Rt. Hon. Dame Judith Constance Mary, DBE (Clydesdale)
Harvey, Roger Lambart (Clwyd, South-West)
Haselhurst, Alan Gordon Barraclough (Saffron Walden)
Hattersley, Rt. Hon. Roy Sydney George (Birmingham, Sparkbrook)
Havers, Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Michael Oldfield, QC (Wimbledon)
Hawkins, Christopher James (High Peak)
Hawkins, Sir Paul Lancelot, TD (South-West Norfolk)
Hawksley, Philip Warren (The Wrekin)
Hayes, Jeremy Joseph James (Harlow)
Hayhoe, Bernard John (Brentford and Isleworth)
Haynes, David Francis (Ashfield)
Hayward, Robert Antony (Kingswood)
Healey, Rt. Hon. Denis Winston, CH, MBE (Leeds, East)
Heathcoat-Amory, David Philip (Wells)
Heath, Rt. Hon. Edward Richard George, MBE (Old Bexley and Sidcup)
Heddle, Bentley John (Mid-Staffordshire)
Heffer, Eric Samuel (Liverpool, Walton)
Henderson, James Stewart Barry (North-East Fife)
Heseltine, Rt. Hon. Michael Ray Dibdin (Henley)
Hickmet, Richard Saladin (Glanford and Scunthorpe)
Hicks, Robert Adrian (South-East Cornwall)
Higgins, Rt. Hon. Terence Langley (Worthing)
Hill, Stanley James Allen (Southampton, Test)
Hind, Kenneth Harvard (West Lancashire)
Hirst, Michael, William (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)
Hogg, Douglas Martin (Grantham)
Hogg, Norman (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth)
Holland, Philip Welsby (Gedling)
Holland, Stuart Kingsley (Vauxhall)
Holt James Richard (Langbaurgh)
Home Robertson, John David (East Lothian)
Hooson, Tom Ellis (Brecon and Radnor)
Hordern, Peter Maudslay (Horsham)
Howard, Michael, QC (Folkestone and Hythe)
Howarth, Alan Thomas (Stratford-on-Avon)
Howarth, James Gerald Douglas (Cannock and Burntwood)
Howe, Rt. Hon. Sir Richard Edward Geoffrey, QC (East Surrey)
Howell, Rt. Hon. David Arthur Russell (Guildford)
Howell, Rt. Hon. Denis Herbert (Birmingham, Small Heath)
Howell, Ralph Frederick (North Norfolk)
Howells, Geraint Wyn (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North)
Hoyle, Eric Douglas Harvey (Warrington, North)
Hubbard-Miles, Peter Charles (Bridgend)
Hughes, Robert (Aberdeen, North)
Hughes, Royston John (Newport, East)
Hughes, Sean Francis (Knowsley, South)
Hughes, Simon Henry Ward (Southwark and Bermondsey)
Hughes, William Mark (City of Durham)
Hume, John (Foyle)
Hunt, David James Fletcher, MBE (Wirral West)
Hunt, John Leonard (Ravensbourne)
Hunter, Andrew Robert Frederick (Basingstoke)
Hurd, Rt. Hon. Douglas Richard, CBE (Witney)

I

Irving, Charles Graham (Cheltenham)

J

Jackson, Robert Victor (Wantage)
Janner, Greville Ewan, QC (Leicester, West)
Jenkin, Rt. Hon. Charles Patrick Fleeming (Wanstead and Woodford)
Jenkins, Rt. Hon. Roy Harris (Glasgow, Hillhead)
Jessel, Toby Francis Henry (Twickenham)
John, Brynmor Thomas (Pontypridd)
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey (Wealden)
Johnston, David Russell (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber)
Jones, Gwilym Hadyn (Cardiff, North)
Jones, Robert Brannock (West Hertfordshire)
Jones, Stephen Barry (Alyn and Deeside)
Jopling, Rt. Hon. Thomas Michael (Westmorland and Lonsdale)
Joseph, Rt. Hon. Sir Keith Sinjohn (Leeds, North-East)

K

Kaufman, Rt. Hon. Gerald Bernard (Manchester, Gorton)
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs. Mary Elaine (Lancaster)
Kennedy, Charles Peter (Ross, Cromarty and Skye)
Kershaw, Sir John Anthony, MC (Stroud)
Key, Simon Robert (Salisbury)
Kilfedder, James Alexander (North Down)
Kilroy-Silk, Robert (Knowsley North)
King, Roger Douglas (Birmingham, Northfield)

King, Rt. Hon. Thomas Jeremy (Bridgwater)
Kinnock, Rt. Hon. Neil Gordon (Islwyn)
Kirkwood, Archibald Johnston (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
Knight, Gregory (Derby North)
Knight, Mrs. Joan Christabel Jill, MBE (Birmingham, Edgbaston)
Knowles, Michael (Nottingham, East)
Knox, David Laidlaw (Staffordshire, Moorlands)

L

Lambie, David (Cunninghame, South)
Lamond, James Alexander (Oldham, Central and Royton)
Lamont, Norman Stewart Hughson (Kingston upon Thames)
Lang, Ian Bruce (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale)
Latham, Michael Anthony (Rutland and Melton)
Lawler, Geoffrey John (Bradford, North)
Lawrence, Ivan John, QC (Burton)
Lawson, Rt. Hon. Nigel (Blaby)
Leadbitter, Edward (Hartlepool)
Lee, John Robert Louis (Pendle)
Leigh, Edward Julian Egerton (Gainsborough and Horncastle)
Leighton, Ronald (Newham North-East)
Lennox-Boyd, Mark Alexander (Morecambe and Lunesdale)
Lester, James Theodore (Broxtowe)
Lewis, Sir Kenneth (Stamford and Spalding)
Lewis, Ronald Howard (Carlisle)
Lewis, Terence (Worsley)
Lightbown, David Lincoln (Staffordshire, South-East)
Lilley, Peter Bruce (St. Albans)
Litherland, Robert Kenneth (Manchester, Central)
Lloyd, Anthony Joseph (Stretford)
Lloyd Ian Stewart (Havant)
Lloyd, Peter Robert Cable (Fareham)
Lofthouse, Geoffrey (Pontefract and Castleford)
Lord, Michael (Suffolk, Central)
Loyden, Edward (Liverpool, Garston)
Luce, Richard Napier (Shoreham)
Lyell, Nicholas Walter, QC (Mid-Bedfordshire)

M

McCartney, Hugh (Clydebank and Milngavie)
McCrea, Rev. Robert Thomas William (Mid-Ulster)
McCrindle, Robert Arthur (Brentwood and Ongar)
McCurley, Mrs. Anna Anderson (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde)
McCusker, James Harold (Upper Bann)
McDonald, Dr. Oonagh Anne (Thurrock)
Macfarlane, David Neil (Sutton and Cheam)
MacGregor, John Roddick Russell, OBE (Norfolk, South)
McGuire, Michael Thomas Francis (Makerfield)
McKay, Allen (Barnsley, West and Penistone)
MacKay, Andrew James (Berkshire, East)
MacKay, John Jackson (Argyll and Bute)
McKelvey, William (Kilmarnock and Loudoun)
MacKenzie, Rt. Hon. James Gregor (Glasgow Rutherglen)
Maclean, David (Penrith and the Border) *[By-election, November 1983]*
Maclennan, Robert Adam Ross (Caithness and Sutherland)
Macmillan, Rt. Hon. Maurice Victor (South West Surrey) [*died March 1984*]
McNair-Wilson, Patrick Michael Ernest David (New Forest)
McNair-Wilson, Robert Michael Conal (Newbury)
McNamara, Joseph Kevin (Kingston upon Hull, North)
McQuarrie, Albert (Banff and Buchan)
McTaggart, Robert (Glasgow, Central)
McWilliam, John David (Blaydon)
Madden, Maxwell Francis (Bradford, West)
Madel, William David (South West Befordshire)
Maginnis, Ken (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Major, John (Huntingdon)
Malins, Humfrey Jonathan (Croydon, North West)
Malone, Gerald (Aberdeen, South)
Maples, John Cradock (Lewisham, West)
Marek, John (Wrexham)
Marland, Paul (West (Gloucestershire))
Marlow, Antony Rivers (Northampton, North)
Marshall, David (Glasgow Shettleston)
Marshall, Robert Michael (Arundel)
Martin, Michael John (Glasgow Springburn)
Mason, Rt. Hon. Roy (Barnsley, Central)
Mates, Michael John (East Hampshire)
Mather, David Carol MacDonell MC (Esher)
Maude, Francis Anthony Aylmer (North Warwickshire)
Mawhinney, Dr. Brian Stanley (Peterborough)
Maxton, John Alston (Glasgow Cathcart)
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robert John (Tiverton)
Mayhew, Patrick Barnabas Burke, QC (Tunbridge Wells)
Maynard, Miss Vera Joan (Sheffield, Brightside)
Meacher, Michael Hugh (Oldham, West)
Meadowcroft, Michael James (Leeds, West)
Mellor, David John (Putney)
Merchant, Piers Rolph Garfield (Newcastle upon Tyne Central)
Meyer, Sir Anthony John Charles Bt. (Clwyd, North West)
Michie, William (Sheffield, Heeley)
Mikardo, Ian (Bow and Poplar)
Millan, Rt. Hon. Bruce (Glasgow Govan)
Miller, Hilary Duppa (Bromsgrove)
Miller, Dr Maurice Solomon (East Kilbride)
Mills, Iain Campbell (Meriden)
Mills, Sir Peter McLay (Torridge and West Devon)
Miscampbell, Norman Alexander, QC (Blackpool, North)
Mitchell, Austin Vernon (Great Grimsby)
Mitchell, David Bower (North West Hampshire)
Moate, Roger Denis (Faversham)
Molyneaux, Rt. Hon. James Henry (Lagan Valley)
Monro, Sir Hector Seymour Peter (Dumfries)
Montgomery, William Fergus (Altrincham and Sale)
Moore, John Edward Michael (Croydon, Central)
Morris, Rt. Hon. Alfred (Manchester, Wythenshawe)
Morris, Rt. Hon. John, QC (Aberavon)
Morris, Michael Wolfgang Laurence (Northampton, South)
Morrison. Hon. Charles Andrew (Devizes)
Morrison, Hon. Peter Hugh (City of Chester)
Moynihan, Hon. Colin Berkeley (Lewisham, East)
Mudd, William David (Falmouth and Camborne)
Murphy, Christopher Philip Yorke (Welwyn, Hatfield)

N

Neale, Gerrard Anthony (North Cornwall)
Needham, Richard Francis (North Wiltshire)
Nellist, David John (Coventry, South-East)
Nelson, Richard Anthony (Chichester)
Neubert, Michael Jon (Romford)
Newton, Antony Harold, OBE (Braintree)
Nicholls, Patrick Charles Martyn (Teignbridge)
Nicholson, James (Newry and Armagh)
Normanton, Tom, TD (Cheadle)
Norris, Steven John (Oxford, East)

O

Oakes, Rt. Hon. Gordon James (Halton)
O'Brien, William (Normanton)
O'Neill, Martin John (Clackmannan)
Onslow, Cranley Gordon Douglas (Woking)
Oppenheim, Philip Anthony Charles Lawrence (Amber Valley)
Oppenheim, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Sally (Gloucester)
Orme, Rt. Hon. Stanley (Salford, East)
Osborn, John Holbrook (Sheffield, Hallam)
Ottaway, Richard Geoffrey James (Nottingham, North)
Owen, Dr. The Rt. Hon. David Anthony Llewellyn, (Plymouth, Devonport)

P

Page, Sir Arthur John (Harrow, West)
Page, Richard Lewis (South-West Hertfordshire)
Paisley, Rev. Ian Richard Kyle (Antrim, North)
Park, George Maclean (Coventry, North-East)
Parkinson, Rt. Hon. Cecil Edward (Hertsmere)
Parris, Matthew Francis (West Derbyshire)
Parry, Robert (Liverpool, Riverside)
Patchett, Terry (Barnsley, East)
Patten, Christopher Francis (Bath)
Patten, John Haggitt Charles (Oxford West and Abingdon)
Pattie, Geoffrey Edwin (Chertsey and Walton)
Pavitt, Laurence Anstice (Brent, South)
Pawsey, James Francis (Rugby and Kenilworth)
Peacock, Mrs. Elizabeth Joan (Batley and Spen)
Pendry, Thomas (Stalybridge and Hyde)
Penhaligon, David Charles (Truro)
Percival, Rt. Hon. Sir Walter Ian, QC (Southport)
Pike, Peter Leslie (Burnley)
Pink, Ralph Bonner, CBE, VRD (Portsmouth, South) [*died May 1984*]
Pollock, Alexander (Moray)
Porter, George Barrington (Wirral, South)
Powell, Rt. Hon. John Enoch, MBE (South Down)
Powell, Raymond (Ogmore)
Powell, William Rhys (Corby)
Powley, John Albert (Norwich, South)
Prentice, Rt. Hon. Reginald Ernest (Daventry)
Prescott, John Leslie (Kingston upon Hull, East)
Price, Sir David Ernest Campbell (Eastleigh)
Prior, Rt. Hon. James Michael Leathes (Waveney)
Proctor, Keith Harvey (Billericay)
Pym, Right Hon. Francis Leslie, MC (South East Cambridgeshire)

R

Radice, Giles Heneage (North Durham)
Raffan, Keith William (Delyn)
Raison, Rt. Hon. Timothy Hugh Francis (Aylesbury)
Randall, Stuart Jeffrey (Kingston upon Hull, West)
Rathbone, John Ranking (Lewes)
Redmond, Martin (Don Valley)
Rees, Rt. Hon. Merlyn (Morley and Leeds, South)
Rees, Peter Wynford Innes, QC (Dover)
Renton, Ronald Timothy (Mid-Sussex)
Rhodes, James Robert Vidal (Cambridge)
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon Meredith (Kensington)
Richardson, Josephine (Barking)
Ridley, Nicholas (Cirencester and Tewkesbury)
Ridsdale, Sir Julian Errington, CBE (Harwich)
Rifkind, Malcolm Leslie (Edinburgh, Pentlands)
Rippon, Rt. Hon. Aubrey Geoffrey Frederick, QC (Hexham)
Roberts, Allan (Bootle)
Roberts, Ernest Alfred Cecil (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington)
Roberts, Jeuan Wyn Pritchard (Conwy)
Robertson, George Islay Macneill (Hamilton)
Robinson, Mark Noel Foster, (Newport, West)
Robinson, Geoffrey (Coventry, North-West)
Robinson, Peter David (Belfast, East)
Roe, Mrs. Marion Audrey (Broxbourne)
Rogers, Allan Ralph (Rhondda)
Rooker, Jeffrey William (Birmingham, Perry Barr)
Ross, Ernest (Dundee, West)
Ross, Stephen Sherlock (Isle of Wight)
Ross, William (Londonderry, East)
Rossi, Sir Hugh Alexander Louis (Hornsey and Wood Green)
Rost, Peter Lewis (Erewash)
Rowe, Andrew (Mid-Kent)
Rowlands, Edward (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney)
Rumbold, Mrs. Angela Claire Rosemary, CBE (Mitcham and Morden)
Ryder, Richard Andrew, OBE (Mid-Norfolk)
Ryman, John (Blyth Valley)

S

Sackville, Thomas Geoffrey (Bolton, West)
Sainsbury, Timothy Alan Davan (Hove)
St. John-Stevas, Rt. Hon. Norman Antony Francis (Chelmsford)
Sayeed, Jonathan (Bristol, East)
Scott, Nicholas Paul MBE (Chelsea)
Sedgemore, Brian Charles John (Hackney, South and Shoreditch)
Shaw, John Giles Dunkerley (Pudsey)
Shaw, Sir Michael Norman (Scarborough)
Sheerman, Barry John (Huddersfield)
Sheldon, Robert Edward (Ashton-under-Lyne)
Shelton, William Jeremy Masefield (Streatham)
Shepherd, Colin Ryley (Hereford)
Shepherd, Richard Charles Scrimgeour (Aldridge-Brownhills)
Shersby, Julian Michael (Uxbridge)
Shore, Rt. Hon. Peter David (Bethnal Green and Stepney)
Short, Mrs. Renée (Wolverhampton, North-East)
Short, Clare (Birmingham, Ladywood)
Silkin, Rt. Hon. John Ernest (Lewisham, Deptford)
Silvester, Frederick John (Manchester, Withington)
Sims, Roger Edward (Chislehurst)
Skeet, Trevor Herbert Harry (North Bedfordshire)
Skinner, Dennis Edward (Bolsover)
Smith, Christopher Robert (Islington, South and Finsbury)
Smith, Cyril, MBE (Rochdale)
Smith, Sir Dudley Gordon (Warwick and Leamington)

Smith, Rt. Hon. John (Monklands, East)
Smith, Timothy John (Beaconsfield)
Smyth, Reverend William Martin (Belfast, South)
Snape, Peter Charles (West Bromwich, East)
Soames, Arthur Nicholas Winston (Crawley)
Soley, Clive Stafford (Hammersmith)
Spearing, Nigel John (Newham, South)
Speed, Herbert Keith, RD (Ashford)
Speller, Antony (North Devon)
Spence, John Deane (Ryedale)
Spencer, Derek Harold, QC (Leicester, South)
Spicer, James Wilton (West Dorset)
Spicer, William Michael Hardy (South Worcestershire)
Squire, Robin Clifford (Hornchurch)
Stanbrook, Ivor Robert (Orpington)
Stanley, Rt. Hon. John Paul (Tonbridge and Malling)
Steel, Rt. Hon. David Martin Scott (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)
Steen, Anthony David (South Hams)
Stern, Michael Charles (Bristol, North-West)
Stevens, Lewis David (Nuneaton)
Stevens, Martin (Fulham)
Stewart, Andrew Struthers (Sherwood)
Stewart, Bernard Harold Ian Halley (North Hertfordshire)
Stewart, Rt. Hon. Donald James (Western Isles)
Stewart, John Allan (Eastwood)
Stokes, John Heydon Romaine (Halesowen and Stourbridge)
Stott, Roger, CBE (Wigan)
Stradling Thomas, John (Monmouth)
Strang, Gavin Steel (Edinburgh, East)
Straw, John Whitaker (Blackburn)
Sumberg, David Anthony Gerald (Bury, South)

T

Tapsell, Peter Hannay Bailey (East Lindsey)
Taylor, Edward Macmillan (Southend, East)
Taylor, Rt. Hon. John David (Strangford)
Taylor, John Mark (Solihull)
Tebbit, Rt. Hon. Norman Beresford (Chingford)
Temple-Morris, Peter (Leominster)
Terlezki, Stefan (Cardif, West)
Thatcher, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Hilda (Finchley)
Thomas, Dafydd Elis (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy)
Thomas, Rt. Hon. Peter John Mitchell, QC (Hendon, South)
Thomas, Dr. Roger Gareth (Carmarthen)
Thompson, Donald (Calder Valley)
Thompson, Hugh Patrick (Norwich. North)
Thompson, John (Wansbeck)
Thorne, Neil Gordon, OBE, TD (Ilford, South)
Thorne, Stanley George (Preston)
Thornton, George Malcolm (Crosby)
Thurnham, Peter Giles (Bolton, North-East)
Tinn, James (Redcar)
Torney, Thomas William (Bradford, South)
Townend, John Ernest (Bridlington)
Townsend, Cyril David (Bexleyheath)
Tracey, Richard Patrick (Surbiton)
Trippier, David Austin (Rossendale and Darwen)
Trotter, Neville Guthrie (Tynemouth)
Twinn, Ian David (Edmonton)

V

van Straubenzee, Sir William Radcliffe, MBE (Wokingham)
Varley, Rt. Hon. Eric Graham (Chesterfield)
Vaughan, Sir Gerard Folliott (Reading, East)
Viggers, Peter John (Gosport)

W

Waddington, David Charles, QC (Ribble Valley)
Wainwright, Richard Scurrah (Colne Valley)
Wakeham, Rt. Hon. John (South Colchester and Maldon)
Waldegrave, William Arthur (Bristol, West)
Walden, George Gordon Harvey, CMG (Buckingham)
Walker, Alfred Cecil (Belfast, North)
Walker, Rt. Hon. Harold (Doncaster, Central)
Walker, Rt. Hon. Peter Edward, MBE (Worcester)
Walker, William Connoll (North Tayside)
Wall, Sir Patrick Henry Bligh, MC, VRD (Beverley)
Wallace, James Robert (Orkney and Shetland)
Waller, Gary Peter Anthony (Keighley)
Walters, Dennis, MBE (Westbury)
Ward, John Devereux, CBE (Poole)
Wardell, Gareth Lodwig (Gower)
Wardle, Charles Frederick (Bexhill and Battle)
Wareing, Robert Nelson (Liverpool, West Derby)
Warren, Kenneth Robin (Hastings and Rye)
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THIRTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 67**

FIRST VOLUME OF SESSION 1984-85

House of Commons

Tuesday 6 November 1984

The House met at twenty-five minutes past Eleven o' clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Message to attend Her Majesty:

The House went:—and having returned;

The Sitting was suspended until half-past Two o'clock, and then resumed.

SESSIONAL ORDERS

ELECTIONS

Mr. Speaker: The Question is—

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask for your guidance? Can you confirm that the Sessional Orders which the House is about to consider are not merely formalities but are open to comment and, if necessary and if hon. Members so wish, may be pressed to a division?

Mr. Speaker: I can confirm that the orders are debatable, but I should warn the hon. Gentleman that it is a narrow order concerned with the printing of the Votes and Proceedings. He may not raise matters of substance when debating that order, but he may, of course, do so during our debate on the Queen's Speech.

Ordered,

That all Members who are returned for two or more places in any part of the United Kingdom to make their Election for which of the places they will serve, within one week after it shall appear that there is no question upon the Return for that place; and if anything shall come in question touching the the Return or Election of any Member, he is to withdraw during the time the matter is in debate; and that all Members returned upon double Returns do withdraw till their Returns are determined.

Resolved,

That no Peer of the Realm, except a Peer of Ireland, hath any right to give his vote in the Election of any Member to serve in Parliament.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been elected or returned a Member of this House, or endeavoured so to be, by Bribery or any other corrupt practices, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against all such persons as shall have been wilfully concerned in such Bribery or other corrupt practices.

WITNESSES

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been tampering with any Witness, in respect of his evidence to be given to this House, or any Committee thereof, or directly or indirectly hath endeavoured to deter or hinder any person from appearing or giving evidence the same is declared to be a high crime and misdemeanour; and this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath given false evidence in any case before this House, or any Committee thereof, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

METROPOLITAN POLICE

Ordered,

That the Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis do take care that during the Session of Parliament the passages through the streets leading to this House be kept free and open and that no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Members to and from this House, and that no disorder be allowed in Westminster Hall, or in the passages leading to this House, during the Sitting of Parliament, and that there be no annoyance therein or thereabouts; and that the Serjeant at Arms attending this House do communicate this Order to the Commissioner aforesaid.

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS

Motion made and Question proposed,

That the Votes and Proceedings of this House be printed, being first perused by Mr. Speaker; and that he do appoint the printing thereof; and that no person but such as he shall appoint do presume to print the same.

2.34 pm

Mr. Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): This is a sweeping order, Mr. Speaker, in that it places upon you

[Mr. Alan Beith]

the daily requirement to peruse the Votes and Proceedings and forbids anyone else from printing the Votes and Proceedings of the House. I am bound to question whether this arrangement meets the convenience of the House, as it is at least possible that, if someone else were given the opportunity to print the Votes and Proceedings, he might be able so to set them out and so to interpret them, with interpretative comment between the various Votes and Proceedings, as to make a little clearer precisely what happens in the Chamber. For example, when an Opposition Day is taken for debate, instead of the Votes and Proceedings baldly stating who moved the motion and the votes cast, it might be made a little clearer that this was one of 19 days, sixteen and a half of which were taken by the Leader of the Labour party, and only one of which went to the parties which got almost as much support at the general election as did the Labour party. But the story does not end there——

Hon. Members: Ah.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I told the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) that this order is concerned with printing and is not a matter of substance. Therefore, I do not think that we can have a long story.

Mr. Beith: My story is not long and can be told simply and briefly. However, it must be told clearly. The Votes and Proceedings for Tuesday 30 October illustrate that the manner in which the proceedings are currently printed and set out gives a misleading impression of what transpired. Those Votes and Proceedings clearly state:

"A Motion was made, and the Question being put, That this House do now adjourn".

That motion appeared in the name of a member of the Government, but it should be borne in mind that the Votes and Proceedings are printed without any of the content of debate annexed to them. During that debate, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he was grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for choosing the subject for that day. Therefore, the Votes and Proceedings did not make clear that there was a 20th Opposition day, although it took place on a motion moved in the name of the Government.

The Leader of the House could resolve this problem, Mr. Speaker, and make your task of perusing these Votes and Proceedings day by day a great deal easier if he came forward with new arrangements which fitted more exactly with our proceedings and traditions and fairly represented the elements in the House. If he fails to do so, we are bound to express our deep disapproval, which we know is shared widely outside the House, in this and other ways.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 217, Noes 17.

Division No. 1] **[2.37 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Benyon, William
Bermingham, Gerald
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Coivin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James A.
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
McCusker, Harold
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Major, John
Marlow, Antony
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Fergus
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, William
Onslow, Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas

Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Tapsell, Peter
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tim Sainsbury and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kennedy, Charles
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wrigglesworth, Ian

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Meadowcroft and
Mr. John Cartwright.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That the Votes and Proceedings of this House be printed, being first perused by Mr. Speaker; and that he do appoint the printing thereof; and that no person but such as he shall appoint do presume to print the same.

Outlawries

Bill for the more effectual preventing Clandestine Outlawries; *read the First time; to be read a Second time.*

Journal

Ordered,

That the Journal of this House, from the end of the last Session to the end of the present Session, with an index thereto, be printed.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by the appointment and under the direction of Mr. Kenneth Anthony Bradshaw, CB, the Clerk of this House.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by such person as shall be licensed by Mr. Speaker, and that no other person do presume to print the same.

Queen's Speech

Mr. Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that this House has this day attended Her Majesty in the House of Peers, and that Her Majesty was pleased to make a Most Gracious Speech from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament, of which I have, for greater accuracy, obtained a copy.

I shall direct that the terms of the Gracious Speech be printed at the appropriate place in the Votes and Proceedings. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I look forward with great pleasure to receiving the President of Malawi and the President of Mexico on State Visits during the next twelve months, to paying a State Visit to Portugal in March, and to visiting the Caribbean in the autumn on the occasion of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in the Bahamas.

My Government consider as their highest priority the maintenance of national security and the preservation of peace. They will accordingly continue to play an active part in the Atlantic Alliance. They will promote Western defence interests outside the NATO area. They will make vigorous efforts to combat international terrorism.

With the allies of the United Kingdom, my Government will contribute to arms control and disarmament negotiations and will work for the resumption of negotiations where these have been broken off. They will work continually for a greater atmosphere of trust between East and West.

Following the agreement at Fontainebleau on the fairer sharing of the Community's budget burden and on the overall control of Community spending, my Government look forward to the further development of the European Community. They will continue to press for improvements in the Common Agricultural Policy and for completion of the common market in goods and services. They will work for the early conclusion of the negotiations to enable Spain and Portugal to join the Community, and to conclude a new agreement to succeed the Lomé Convention.

My Government will continue fully to discharge their obligations to the people of the Falkland Islands, while seeking more normal relations between this country and Argentina. They will consider the views expressed by the people of Hong Kong on the draft agreement with China, and report to Parliament. They reaffirm their commitment to the people of Gibraltar and hope to see the early implementation of the Lisbon statement.

My Government will continue to work for a settlement in Namibia, a solution to the Arab/Israel dispute and the restoration of the independence and non-aligned status of Afghanistan.

My Government will continue fully to support the Commonwealth, to play a constructive role at the United Nations, to maintain a substantial aid programme, and to encourage investment in developing countries.

My Government will continue to work closely with other nations and international institutions to strengthen and spread economic recovery; and to co-operate on issues connected with the settlement of international debts.

Members of the House of Commons

Estimates for the Public Service will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government will continue to pursue policies founded on sound money and lower public borrowing and aimed at securing a further reduction in inflation. While noting that the numbers of people in work are steadily rising, my Government remains deeply concerned about unemployment and will continue policies designed to achieve better opportunities for employment and to help the unemployed obtain the training or work experience needed to fill them.

Firm control of public spending will be maintained. My Government will work for a more flexible and competitive economy through lower taxation, further reform of the tax system, increased efficiency in the public sector and encouragement of initiative and enterprise which will sustain rising living standards.

In order to promote efficiency and growth, my Government will continue their policies of exposing state-owned businesses to competition and, where appropriate, returning them to the private sector. A Bill will be introduced to increase competition in the provision of local bus services in Great Britain and to transfer to the private sector the operations of the National Bus Company.

A Bill will be introduced to increase competition in retail banking by completing the transition of the Trustee Savings Banks to private sector status.

Bills will be introduced to reform insolvency law in England and Wales, and in Scotland, and to remove the statutory levy on cinema admissions and establish an environment for the film and cinema industries free from regulation.

A Bill will be introduced to abolish the Greater London Council and the metropolitan county councils.

Legislation will be introduced to extend the franchise to certain British citizens resident abroad, to change absent voting arrangements in order to enable those on holiday to vote, and to increase the parliamentary election deposit but reduce the threshold for forfeiture. A Bill will be introduced to establish a national prosecution service independent of the police in England and Wales and to enable the Attorney General to refer Crown Court sentences for the opinion of the Court of Appeal. A further Bill will establish a new and comprehensive statutory framework governing the interception of communications.

Measures will be introduced for the administration of justice in England and Wales and making further reforms in the law following reports of the Law Commission. There will be a measure dealing with the international aspects of child abduction and the custody of children.

A Bill will be introduced to improve the occupational pension rights of people who leave schemes before pensionable age and to ensure that members are able to obtain information about their schemes.

Legislation will be introduced for the better protection of food and the environment.

A Bill will be introduced to give parents of children educated at public expense the right to exempt them from corporal punishment. My Government will continue to develop policies to raise educational standards.

My Government will encourage the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland to consider how powers can be restored to local administration on a basis acceptable to all sides of the community, and will seek to maintain good relations with the Government of the Republic of Ireland. The security forces will continue to receive my Government's full support. Legislation will be introduced to prevent personation at elections in Northern Ireland.

Bills will be introduced to establish trustee bodies to manage certain Scottish institutions, and to reform Scots law, including provisions on matrimonial property and financial provision on divorce, following Reports by the Scottish Law Commission.

Other measures will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Debate on the Address

[FIRST DAY]

Mr. Speaker: Before I call those Members who are to propose and second the motion on the Loyal Address, it may be for the convenience of the House if I set out the subjects that are suggested for the various days' debates. Today will be a general debate; tomorrow, Wednesday 7 November, the subjects will be local government and transport; on Thursday 8 November — health, social security and education; Friday 9 November — foreign affairs and overseas development; Monday 12 November —industry and employment; Tuesday 13 November— the economy.

2.49 pm

Sir Paul Bryan (Boothferry): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

The Boothferry constituency has only recently been born. My constituents are therefore a little surprised and very honoured indeed that so early in its life their Member of Parliament has been chosen to move the Loyal Address. As for their Member, however long one has served in the House this privilege remains one of the most coveted and, as I am discovering, one of the most awesome in our proceedings. I am in turn equally honoured.

Because of its recent birth and less than descriptive name it may be that one or two—or even three or four —hon. Members do not know where Boothferry is: or what it is. For their benefit I should explain that the constituency starts in typical East Riding country, in an area apparently picked at the whim of the Boundary Commission, where there are pleasant villages with such homely names as Wetwang and Bugthorpe. It then runs some 50 miles southwards over the Yorkshire wolds, the Vale of York, over the Ouse, taking in the town and port of Goole, and then across the Isle of Axholme, past Epworth, the birthplace of John Wesley, and then to such villages as Haxey, whose postal address is Doncaster. So one can perhaps see why the Boundary Commission resorted to a neutral name borrowed from an old bridge over the river Ouse.

I had very little industry in my old constituency, Howden. Now, with the addition of Goole, I have a lot. I welcome this, because for many years I worked in industry in the West Riding of Yorkshire. I learnt my first lessons in politics there when I fought Sowerby three times in three years; and lost Sowerby three times in three years to Douglas Houghton. Since then the Conservative cause in Sowerby has been championed by a man of greater weight than me, and he has made it into a safe Conservative seat. He is now my Whip, so the lesson goes on.

Boothferry is a microcosm of Britain. We have everything there. In Goole we have industry, a shipyard, docks and a threatened railway service. The closing of the steelworks in next-door Scunthorpe has increased unemployment, which now stands at 18 per cent. in Goole. We have high technology with such firms as Croda. We have small firms springing up in the trading estates at Goole and others waiting to set up in those estates if Goole continues to be an assisted area.

In Howden we have the phenomenon called Hygena Ltd., which in eight brief years has emerged as the largest manufacturer of kitchen equipment in England, employing 760 people and still expanding. Beyond those industries there are some of the best managed farms in the country —large estates such as Garrowby, which has bred a Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, and a Derby winner, Shirley Heights. We have many prosperous arable farms, as well as dairy farmers worried about their milk quota. The East Riding has the largest concentration of pig producers in England.

Taking into account that representative variety of industries and interests, I judge that a Queen's Speech which is good for Boothferry is good for Britain. The most serious and intractable problem in Britain, as in Boothferry, is unemployment. That is more than recognised in the Queen's Speech. The message of the Queen's Speech is that the Government will do all within their means to reduce unemployment. They will try to produce conditions under which real jobs can be created. They will provide training for young people so that they can take up job vacancies when they occur. They will provide money for assisted areas. It is up to people's enterprise to sell goods and services at lower prices than our competitors and so make work for the jobless.

The town of Goole has got that message clearly. Blessed with the M62 and good docks, even in these difficult times it is attracting new industries. After gallant efforts by British Shipbuilders to save the dockyard, the shipyard had to close last November. The situation then seemed hopeless. Nevertheless, the shipyard has now reopened. Cochranes of Selby has bought it, and from the talks that I have had with the management there I am sure that before long many of the skilled workers who used to work in the shipyard will be back at work again.

So much for creating jobs. But jobs have to be kept as well. A certain amount of our unemployment is due to our throwing away jobs. I asked the managing director of Chex Products in Goole, a new high technology firm, why he had set up in Goole. He said, "We have always been able to get our stuff out of Goole docks." Many other ports have lost jobs because shipowners and shippers cannot afford to let ships lie idle while management and dockers sort out their differences. That is not so at Goole. There the labour relations remain good and the port goes from strength to strength, as indeed does the small port of Howdendyke not far away.

Those people are self-reliant and do not turn to the Government for much, but they do think that an unemployment rate of 18 per cent. justifies its remaining an assisted area and they appeal to the Secretary of State for Transport to save their railway line. Goole is fighting unemployment with enterprise and ingenuity.

I turn now to Hong Kong, the supreme example of enterprise and ingenuity which, rightly, features in the Queen's Speech. I was in Peking two years ago when the Prime Minister started the negotiations on Hong Kong. I was in Hong Kong in September to hear the Governor announce the signing of the draft agreement between China and Her Majesty's Government. The agreement pleased the people of Hong Kong. This has been confirmed by the welcome given to it in the recent debate in the Legislative Council in Hong Kong.

[Sir Paul Bryan]

The detailed nature of the agreement was a tremendous victory for my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, for the Governor and for the brilliant negotiating team. It is the comprehensiveness of the document, showing a deep understanding of the unique situation of Hong Kong, that has given confidence.

The agreement is unprecedented in that it does not come into force for 13 years. Confidence will rise or fall during that time in direct relation to the conduct of the signatory powers. China, on its side, has to draft a basic law which clearly and faithfully represents the agreement. Britain, in turn, has to show its evident and steadfast commitment to Hong Kong right up to 1997.

Some of my constituents, particularly the boys of Pocklington school, of which I am a governor, would not forgive me if I did not at least bring to the notice of the House the connection with Boothberry of one of the greatest parliamentarians of all time — William Wilberforce. At the age of 12, after the death of his father, he was placed in the care of the endowed school at Pocklington. He is reported to have neglected his studies; that could not of course happen at the present Pocklington school. He was also alleged to have been somewhat idle at Cambridge university, and in his later and more serious days

"he could not look back without unfeigned remorse on the opportunities he had then neglected."

I am not sure that I look back on the opportunities that I neglected at Cambridge in quite such tragic terms, but then I had less talent to squander.

A speech like this is too short to do justice to the career of that great man, but memories of his achievements and his standing in history came back to us 15 months ago at the service in Westminster to commemorate the 150th anniversary of his death. It is relevant to the first motion that you put to us, Mr. Speaker, to remind the House that one of William Wilberforce's less known feats, unequalled by any hon. Member in the Chamber, occurred in the election of 1784, when somehow he won two constituencies—Hull and Yorkshire. Wisely, he chose the latter.

When I go back to my constituency on a Friday, I often find that we have spent the previous days, and sometimes nights, discussing here issues that are, to say the least, not uppermost in the minds of my constituents. We are in danger of getting immersed in our own preoccupations; so it matters for Parliament's reputation that the gap between our priorities and those of our constituents does not get too wide. We should beware of that during the coming year as we hammer out legislation on the many important items in the Queen's Speech.

I suggest that, whatever we choose to talk about here, our constituents will be increasingly preoccupied with two special worries—unemployment and violence in all its ugly forms. They see on television the Brighton outrage, the scenes from the coalfields and their fellow countrymen running riot in Spanish resorts and on foreign football grounds. To them, violence and vandalism are no longer what other people suffer. They are suffered by our constituents in their own towns and villages. Twenty years ago, one would have said that it could not happen in this country. Of course, no Queen's Speech can prescribe a simple cure. Nevertheless, as the House presumes to provide political leadership, our constituents look to us, never mind to which party we belong, to unite in our efforts to stamp out this plague.

3.3 pm

Mr. Richard Needham (Wiltshire, North): I second the motion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Sir P. Bryan) has spoken with feeling about the future of Hong Kong, and I am sure that the House knows how much he has done not only for Hong Kong but for relations between Britain and China. I hope that my hon. Friend will not mind if I point out that when he was born the lease still had 85 years to run. Although I am sure that he is extremely well known in his own constituency, he is probably almost as well known by now in the streets of Hong Kong, or at least in the New Territories.

For the past week I have been scratching my head as to why I should have been asked to second the Gracious Speech. After all, as has been pointed out, I am the only disfranchised Irish earl on these Back Benchers. When I heard the Gracious Speech — particularly the bit proposing legislation for the better protection of the environment—it became clear to me that I had been chosen as a spokesman for one endangered species. Three members of my family have occupied these Benches. They all represented that beautiful part of the United Kingdom —South Down. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that they ever occupied the columns of *Hansard*. They did not, as Brian Johnston might have put it, much trouble the scorers. That may have been because their sixth sense told them that the current right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) would make up for their long pregnant pauses with his own loquacity.

We all know that the invitation to second the Gracious Speech comes from the Prime Minister on the advice of the Patronage Secretary. Neither he nor my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, can be in their seats today. I, as much as anyone, welcome their recovery. I look forward, as does the whole House, to seeing the Patronage Secretary back in his place in the not too distant future, with that deceptive smile, which we rebellious Back Benchers know means "Watch it". I am also sure that none of us can even contemplate what they have been through. We know only that we want them back here where they belong.—[Hon Members: "Hear, hear."]

I am also conscious that I speak today from among the junior ranks of Back Benchers. In such circumstances, many of us feel like nervous amateurs compared with the professionalism of Front Benchers. However, we can comfort ourselves with the knowledge that the ark was built by amateurs, but professionals built the Titanic.

I came into the House with several friends who at that point became honourable—

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Where are they now?

Mr. Needham: I was just about to tell the House.

Most of those colleagues have gone up in the world and done well for themselves, despite a helping hand from me. All of them—let me practise a little Christian charity, which the whole House will know is 18 carat—deserve the buckles on their coats. Nowadays I know a

Parliamentary Secretary in almost every Department, so I can at least put a face to the people who sign the letters to my constituents.

My constituency was happily called Chippenham until the Boundary Commission romantically renamed it Wiltshire, North. Many Opposition Members, who I am glad to say are hon. Friends outside this Chamber, tell me how lucky I must be to have such an Arcadia full of grazing heifers and Tory voters—*[Laughter.]* If only they were right. I am afraid Lloyd George seems to have known all too many fathers in my constituency. Pavement politics are not unknown in my constituency. More to the point, I look at the size of the Labour vote with as much consternation as the Leader of the Opposition. I should like to wish him luck. That is, better luck for me.

My constituency has an almost perfect balance between towns and villages, industry and agriculture. I only wish that Harris of Calne had been as successful in resisting the Danes as King Alfred was at Malmesbury 1,000 years earlier.

The major concern in my constituency, as in other constituencies, is unemployment. I welcome what the Government have done up to now in the sphere of training. Would that it had been done somewhat earlier. After all, the numbers who would be looking for work in the 1980s were well known in the 1970s. The Government have recognised the unemployment problems in the appointment of my noble Friend Lord Young. That is an indication of the seriousness with which the Government view the problem. I hope that he will be as successful in his new job as he was as chairman of the Manpower Services Commission.

I draw briefly to the attention of the House two aspects of unemployment. In the 20 to 24 age range is a group of chronic unemployed who have been out of work for three years. Their numbers have increased eightfold in the past five years and now number nearly 60,000. The figure looks set to grow to 100,000 over the next few years. The seeds of their fate were sown more than 10 years ago when a golden opportunity was missed to install a proper system of training. The Government have now seized the opportunity to reconstruct our lamentably inadequate training system. There is now real hope for youngsters leaving school.

What of those who are too old to benefit, who were 16 when the Conservative Government introduced the youth training scheme? What of them, now 20 or 24? They have no foothold on the training ladder. They have no skill with which to find a job. They are specifically and specially at risk. They are not just out of work for a few months or a few years; they are drifting through life in a sea of despair with their heads barely above water. Surely a lifeline for them, so that they can put a foot on the training ladder, should be part of any enterprising package.

The second aspect is that 750,000 people are working over the official pension age. The numbers appear to be creeping up again. I do not suggest in present company, especially on the day of the American presidential election, that we should have compulsory retirement, but why is that more people here work over retirement age than in Belgium, Holland, Germany or Italy? I hope that we can find ways of removing unnecessary hindrances for those who want to retire and so allow greater opportunity for youngsters seeking work.

In the last year I have been Parliamentary Private Secretary to my right hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior). For a good few years before that he had been a friend of mine. I learnt not only to respect his balance and "bottom", but to be grateful to him. After all, he gave me the opportunity to know the country of my ancestry rather better than my ancestors knew it. My right hon. Friend also taught me the need for politicians to be as good listeners as they are talkers and, when the going gets rough, to mix courage and determination with compassion and compromise.

Three-and-a-half weeks ago the British people saw how their Government behaved when members and their wives were bombed. They were rightly proud of what they saw. A few days later they heard the reactions in the House of Commons. They heard the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) say that the gap between one side of the House and the other was as a hair's breadth compared with the chasm between terrorism and democracy. They were rightly proud of what they heard. In a few moments the debate on the Queen's Speech resumes along familiar lines. It is through this House, via the ballot box, that the government of Britain is conducted. Neither violence from outside, bomb or bullet will alter that. We know that, the British people know that, and every one of us will fight to the last to ensure that it stays that way.

3.15 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I warmly compliment both the hon. Member for Boothferry (Sir P. Bryan) and the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham) on their speeches. I sympathise with them in what they described as a challenging event because 10 years ago I had to do exactly the same. On that occasion—[AN HON. MEMBER: "Look where it got you."] If hon. Members thought that proposing or seconding the Loyal Address would get them to the Dispatch Box, there would be fewer volunteers.

I was assisted on that occasion by some helpful advice—which I understand is still being given out—from the Chief Whip's office. I have retained that guide and comforter, which showed me how best to approach seconding the Loyal Address. I suspect that both hon. Members who spoke today have that same document in their possession. It is there to help—in the phrase of the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North—nervous amateurs. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that it was not those who built the Titanic that were at fault but the captain who would not change course.

The House should know that the document advises that speeches

"should be short—no longer than 12 minutes."

I give both hon. Members 10 out of 10 for that. It states:

"This means careful timing beforehand."

It advises:

"Be non-controversial but not solemn—the occasional light touch is much appreciated . . . It is customary to begin by mentioning one's own constituency in a couple of happy phrases."

Of the greatest interest to the House is the advice

"Great care should be taken of the Speech because of its secrecy."

Perhaps somebody should have told the newspapers 10 days ago that the speech was supposed to be a secret. Somebody should have told Mr. Brian Curtois who, as I shaved this morning, gave me an excellent resumé of exactly what would be in the Queen's Speech.

[Mr. Neil Kinnock]

I know that I speak for the whole House in saying that we enjoyed the speeches of both hon. Members. The hon. Member for Boothferry is well known and well respected and is a senior Member of the House. Perhaps his most distinctive quality, apart from his charm and great calmness, is his bravery. That has been manifested not only by his distinguished record as a soldier, who received two of the highest awards for gallantry that can be given by this country, but by his stinging and sustained attacks on the Government for the way in which they have priced so many overseas and Commonwealth students out of higher education. I endorse his views on that matter.

Perhaps the best testimony to the hon. Gentleman's boldness was his decision to stand against the right hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. du Cann) and contest the chairmanship of the 1922 Committee and—valour of valour, as we would expect from a real warrior—his decision to become the campaign manager for Viscount Whitelaw in the 1975 Tory party leadership election. That was a very brave act.

I admire the hon. Gentleman's courage and steadfastness, and among his steadfast characteristics is his commitment to the cause of the people and interests of Hong Kong. Indeed, he mentioned that interest during his welcome speech. His commitment to the colony, which is the only Chinese takeaway that does not carry VAT these days, is well known in the House.

I have a warm spot for the hon. Member for Boothferry. It was he who initiated me into one of the great mysteries of the House early in 1971 when he was Minister of State, Department of Employment, and I was merely a fierce fledgling. He approached me and complimented me on a speech. I was entirely bewildered—a Tory coming up and complimenting me on my speech! [HON. MEMBERS: "It will not happen again".] I trust not. It was in a bewildered state that I went to one of my favourite gurus, who is now known to the House as Viscount Tonypandy. I met him at his headquarters, the Welsh table in the Tea Room, which is just down the corridor. I told him of my experience and the former Speaker said, drawing on his cigar which he used to smoke in those days and sipping his coffee, "Paul Bryan? A very tidy fellow, Paul Bryan. When he compliments you he means it; lots of them don't, you know."

I am sure that the compliment of the hon. Member for Boothferry in 1971 was as genuine as mine is today.

The hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham) and I met some years ago on an "Any Questions" programme, when we had the exquisitely embarrassing experience of agreeing about a great many things. That is always a difficulty when one appears on that programme. I thought of him then as a young man on his way up. The hon. Gentleman is two months older than myself and he already had an earldom and declined to use the title. I thought to myself, "Kinnock, what are you doing wrong, or what did your great-great-grandfather do wrong?"

A few years have passed since we appeared on that "Any Questions" programme, and the House has come to know the hon. Gentleman better. We note his criticism of the Government and we hear his humour, and we have heard some fine examples this afternoon. We can read his humour as well as hear it, in his book entitled "Honourable Member". One part of his book is directed to why men and women seek political fortune in the Conservative party. He tells us that some do so through altruism and some through excitement. He continues:

"there are those who for one reason or another end up there"—

"there" being the House—

> "This category includes a fair proportion of ordinary folk who allow their names to go forward after a stint in local government and perhaps a drink too many in the local Constitutional Club, only to discover to their horror that their homely platitudes to the local Selection Committee have won their votes as well as their hearts."

The hon. Gentleman will not win our votes today but he has gone a long way towards winning our hearts.

This man, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North, is more than just a critic, a humorist and a wet of a wit; he is a man of wisdom. Four years ago he wrote that if demands to end secondary picketing, to impose mandatory strike ballots and to stop supplementary benefit to striking families were put into effect,

> "not only would the law be back before 1850 rather than 1906 but one of the fundamental democratic rights of the British people, the right to withdraw one's labour, would have been rendered virtually unusable. The law would be flouted on a massive scale and its enforceability would become even more impossible."

After reading that, I have only one thing to say to the Prime Minister through you, Mr. Speaker, and that is, "Give the man from Wiltshire a job."

A major advantage of the Gracious Speech is that it presents the agenda for Parliament, an early warning system and a declaration of purpose by Government—all essential to our vigilant democracy. Most particularly about its advantages, I agree with Sir Winston Churchill who, in addressing the House as Prime Minister in 1944, said:

> "I have always rejoiced that the Debate on the general aspects of the Address . . . is the time when a Member who has got no friends and has got no group can get up and speak about anything in the world".—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1944; Vol. 406, c. 25.]

It was true in 1944; it is true now. The next days of debate provide an opportunity for a Member who has got no friends and no group, so we will be hearing from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. [HON. MEMBERS: "Smile."] The Chancellor of the Exchequer is not smiling—no wonder he is called "Melancholy Blaby". I am sure that during the next few days we shall be hearing from the right hon. Gentleman and the Prime Minister. *[Interruption.]* Come on, louder.

We have listened many times to the Prime Minister. We listened to her at her annual party conference on a day when she showed immense personal courage and calm. I do not think that anyone would want to take that from the right hon. Lady. We have listened in all kinds of circumstances to her speaking both inside and outside the House. The conviction grows — not just among Opposition Members or in the House in general, not just among foes and critics, but among people who would be friends and allies of the Prime Minister—that she does not mean what she says when she talks about her concern for unemployment.

It is a terrible indictment of the Prime Minister that no one now believes that she is serious or sincere in her attitude to unemployment. We know that she is not serious, because this year's concern, as it is mentioned in the Queen's Speech, is exactly the same as last year's. We see a stale and terrible sameness in this year's Queen's Speech. We look at the document and say, "We have been here before and it does not work." We know that because,

in the 17 months between the last Queen's Speech—the last undertaking to increase economic prosperity and reduce unemployment—and this year's undertaking to do the same, unemployment has increased by 133,000, mortgage payments have increased by 25 per cent., inflation has increased by 27 per cent., industrial production has fallen by 0·8 per cent. and the taxation of personal incomes has risen by 8·5 per cent. in total. That is what has been happening to our country in the gap between one undertaking and the next.

The right hon. Lady used to say, as she said when she first addressed the House as Prime Minister in 1979, that under the Labour Government

"the full magnitude of our decline has been concealed by North sea oil."—[*Official Report*, 15 May 1979; Vol. 967, c. 76.]

That was at a time when the total revenue obtained in three years by the Labour Government from North sea oil revenue was £881 million — less than one month's revenue received by this Government from North sea oil. That is why, five years and £42 billion of North sea oil revenue later, I say with more force and more truth than the Prime Minister could ever muster in 1979: the full magnitude of our decline has been masked by North sea oil—decline like the £400 billion in output that would have occurred if production had stayed on the same level as 1979, decline like the 2 million jobs lost, including 1·7 million manufacturing jobs lost in those five years, and decline like the £35 billion fall in total investment since 1979.

I ask the right hon. Lady—I hope that she will give me an answer—how long does she think she can go on depriving and depressing our economy like this and still hope for resilient and significant economic growth? What does she think will happen when the North sea oil revenues start to decline? Does she know what will happen? Does she care? I do, not just because it will occur in my lifetime and that of hon. Members here today but most particularly because it could leave my children and all the children of their generation with the disadvantages of a shrunken economy and a reduced manufacturing base—a country that has stopped being a great trader because of the decline built in by the right hon. Lady in the past five years.

The Queen's Speech this year is a dismal confession of the Government's failure. The Government are saying, here and elsewhere, that they have brought inflation down, but that still has not brought recovery, as they promised. They say that they dare not reflate because they think that that is evil. They say, "We are stuck, pinned, fastened and paralysed between our fixations about inflation and our dogma about reflation". That is the position that the Government are in and that is why the Chancellor of the Exchequer is so frequently and correctly described as being in a state of inertia. He is trapped between the promises that the Government made and the needs that he knows exist at present. I feel sorry for him. He is treading water. He is stuck in the middle while the Prime Minister is supposed to be walking on the water.

It is a difficult position for the right hon. Gentleman, and everyone is fed up with it. Is it just the youngsters and their parents? No, it is more than that. People of all kinds of politics, ages and social class are fed up with it. It is not just the unions that are fed up. In its recent conference, the CBI has demonstated—as anyone who has close acquaintance and frequent discussions with managers knows—that it is fed up with the way in which matters are being conducted.

The Government believe that a reduction in pay and benefits would make a difference to employment totals. That is what the Chancellor said last week. The CBI has said that that is not true. A tiny percentage of those who declare on those questions say, that it would make any difference. The CBI says that firms are encountering shortages of skilled workers in the midst of this high unemployment. The CBI reaffirms the need—contrary to what the Chancellor and many members of the Government say—for a sound manufacturing base. The CBI wants increased public expenditure and infrastructure and construction improvements. It wants education and training for everyone up to the age of 18. In all those areas, and more, Government policy contradicts, frustrates and inhibits workers and managers who want to get recovery going. There is nothing in the Queen's Speech for jobs, for fresh investment for expanding trade or to boost training. All we have are the platitudes of concern——

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): Nonsense.

Mr. Kinnock: Yes, we have a great deal of nonsense as well—backed by the promises of more cuts in health, housing and the urban aid programme in a week's time. On top of that, we have the Chancellor's assertion that there must be a cut in real wages. It always ends up there. They cannot kick the habit of for ever recommending courses of action to everyone else that they would refuse to accept for themselves.

The Government always abuse "Get on your bike", "Work part time", "Obey the rules", "Wait in line", "Take a cut in wages". The immortal words of Woodie Guthrie come back — [HON. MEMBERS: "Who?"] They are ignoramuses as well—

"Just do as I say. Don't do as I do.
When you hear me call for sacrifice, I'm only talking about you."

That is the Tory party's motto in every generation. That is not just their attitude towards the British people; it is their attitude everywhere.

With the dreadful evidence of Ethiopia before their eyes, the British people have never been more aware of the horrors of famine; they have never shown greater generosity and open-heatedness than they are showing now. Every Member of the House should be rightly proud of the attitude being adopted by the British people.

Against that background, the Gracious Speech speaks of maintaining the Government's "substantial aid programme". The people of this country who are giving so open-heartedly should be told that they are governed by a Government who claim to be maintaining a substantial aid programme but who have cut aid by 14 per cent. in real terms since 1979, which means that in real terms they are giving £160 million less to the starving than in 1979. That is a huge loss in money, but an even greater loss in jobs. [HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it!"] If Conservative Members do not believe that our commitment to the starving is important they are at odds not just with the British people but with their own party's supposed commitment.

Last weekend the Prime Minister and I visited India in tragic circumstances. Even in that short time we saw the awful oppression of poverty and in that split second of history I think that we were both bound to agree with the view of Mahatma Gandhi that poverty is the greatest violence. The Government have not done, are not doing

[Mr. Kinnock]

and will not do their moral and economic duty to the poor of the world any more than to those in need in this country. Everywhere their policy is to dispossess, to deprive and to divide. That has been their attitude, among other things, to the coal dispute—a matter which is of great concern to the whole country but which was suspiciously absent from the Gracious Speech.

What is the Prime Minister's response to the statements from the British Association of Colliery Management? It has clearly stated that

"management at all levels . . . especially at very senior levels"

has

"lost confidence in the office"

of the chief executive. The Prime Minister cannot ignore or evade the issue. The chief executive was very much her own appointee. In style and in substance he has acted according to her terms and has been a faithful executor of her ideology, her policy and her will. What is her judgment of that faithful servant now? I believe that we know what it is, not from the Prime Minister's words but from her lack of words. When I asked her about this last Tuesday, her silence was deafening. We need a clearer, more precise statement. She has the opportunity to make that statement today.

Is the Prime Minister's appointee as chairman of the National Coal Board still in favour? Is her confidence in him now exhausted or merely uneconomic? We need to know the Prime Minister's attitude to matters of such great concern to the country. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about your confidence in Scargill?"] I am talking about the Prime Minister's own appointee. I know how embarrassed Conservative Members are at the Government's conduct of these affairs. I appeal to the Prime Minister to use her powers of intervention, to understand the cost of the dispute and the need fully to restore negotiating procedures for the future of the collieries and an end to the strike.

I hope that the Prime Minister will not be deaf to these appeals as she is deaf to so many others. I want her to adopt a course of production and reconciliation not just in the coal mining industry but in other areas. Let her adopt that attitude, instead, for instance, of seeking to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan councils, which will decrease local accountability, increase centralisation and weaken essential services without saving the ratepayers of this country any money at all.

Before the Government descend further into folly, will they consider the variety of solutions offered? Whatever the values of strict Government control, quangos, a single selected authority, joint boards and privatisation, they cannot be described as bringing control nearer to the people. The transfer of GLC functions to the boroughs, allegedly to give the electorate more direct control, is a deception, according to Mr. Robert Mitchell. He is the Conservative GLC member for Wanstead and Woodford, which is the constituency of the Secretary of State for the Environment. He is about to waste some of the best hours of his political life in perpetrating that deception in the Bill to abolish the GLC and metropolitan county councils. Like much Tory local government strategy, the abolition plans are nothing more than prejudice made policy.

The Government have hit local government, and therefore services and our people, from every angle. They hit people through their abolition plans, their plans to withdraw the right to vote, in every area where people need the sustenance of public services. They are hitting local services, education, industrial development and the construction industry. The Government are slowing and stopping the engines of recovery. The public expenditure plans for next year will hit even harder.

The Government, who are given to quoting the policies of John Maynard Keynes, operate policies of withdrawal, slow-down, suppression of demand and regression in the economy. John Maynard Keynes said:

> "It is often said by wiseacres that we cannot spend more than we earn. That is . . . exceedingly misleading if it is applied to the community as a whole. For the community as a whole, it would be much truer to say that we cannot earn more than we spend . . . output and employment cannot increase, unless the first stimulant comes from the side of increased spending, though in this context I include, of course . . . capital expenditure on housing and the like."

To borrow a phrase from the Prime Minister, that is vintage Keynes. As the Prime Minister points out, Keynes wants higher efficiency, productivity and all the other great and good things that we all want, but he also understands that investment and consumption must be expanded to produce them. Instead of selectively drawing a phrase or two from the 1944 White Paper on employment policy, I recommend to the Prime Minister almost anything else that John Maynard Keynes wrote. It will utterly confound her misinformation of the country, her misuse of his name and philosophy, and her present promotion of him.

Keynes advised a course of increased production, investment and consumption. In 1944, the tool of policy and objective of the Government was employment. In 1984, the tool of policy and objective of the Government is unemployment. That is the difference between 1944 and 1984. From the town hall to the third world, and every point between them, the Government know no other way but to deprive, depress and divide. The country wants to be confident. Our people want to walk tall, but the Government are forcing millions to crouch. Through the Queen's Speech, the Government are giving our people less chance, less choice, less hope, fewer jobs, and less voice in their own destinies. The Government do not serve the country, they do not deserve to serve the country and our people do not deserve this Government.

3.44 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): My first and pleasant duty is to join the Leader of the Opposition in congratulating my hon. Friends who moved and seconded the Loyal Address. My hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Sir P. Bryan) speaks from the vantage point of someone who has been a member of the House for nearly 30 years. He was Parliamentary Private Secretary to Sir Walter Monckton in about 1956, and he became Minister of State, Department of Employment, so we listened with special interest to what he said about the problems of his constituency. I noticed that he said that the port of Goole had a good present and future because it had proven reliability, something which many other companies could learn. We are indebted to him for his constructive work, as chairman of the House of Commons Parliamentary Group, in helping forward the historic agreement on Hong Kong, which is being considered in Hong Kong and which I hope will shortly come before the House. My hon. Friend played a constructive role in what is an extremely important agreement.

I noted what my hon. Friend said about Wilberforce from the school in his constituency. There is outside my room a sculpture of Wilberforce, but No. 10 Downing street also boasts a Wilberforce: it is a cat in black and white, which has equal disdain for both, but which is very good at the job which it is there to do.

I also thank the seconder of the Loyal Address, my hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), who tackled his task in his usual spirited fashion. Indeed, one never knew what was about to come next. I listened carefully to what he said about the ark. I remind him that the ark was built to keep its inhabitants dry. They went in dry and they came out dry, and I hope that the ark has great relevance to those who occupy the Government Front Bench. It was those who sailed on the Titanic who got wet. However, the light touch of my hon. Friend conceals, as we saw later in his speech, his serious study and his deep-felt views about unemployment. I remember being with him in his constituency in a company that he mentioned, and I join him in hoping that my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) will soon return to the House. I also join in his tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior), which used to be called Lowestoft, for the work that he did in Northern Ireland. I thank and congratulate both my hon. Friends on the way in which they moved and seconded the Loyal Address.

The Leader of the Opposition had some words to say about several issues. He spoke about my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. May I tell the right hon. Gentleman that I have some good news for him—at any rate, it is good news to the Government. While the right hon. Gentleman was speaking, Barclays bank decided to cut by half a percentage point, from 10·5 per cent., the basic bank rate. That is a great tribute to my right hon. Friend for the firmness with which he has controlled the money supply. The money supply figures were published at 2·30 this afternoon, and the cut in interest rates came shortly thereafter.

The Leader of the Opposition also made some points about personal taxation. I remind him that had the rates of the Labour Government remained in force we should now be paying £3·5 billion more in income tax than we are. I also remind him that had we chosen to retain the national insurance surcharge at the level where the Labour Government left it, and applied that money to cuts in income tax, the personal rates would be much below what they are now. He left us with this terrible tax on jobs—the national insurance surcharge—and it was we who took it off.

The right hon. Gentleman made some comments about Keynes. As far as I could make out, he was saying that if we all spend more than we have we shall be very rich. That was always a stupid sentiment. I remind him that the famous White Paper thought to be written by Keynes pointed out that

"the policies proposed in this Paper affect the balancing of the Budget in a particular year, they certainly do not contemplate any departure from the principle that the Budget must be balanced over a longer period".

The right hon. Gentleman made the classic mistake of taking the deficit part without the surplus part in any particular year.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me about Mr. MacGregor. Let me make it perfectly clear that I have every confidence in Mr. MacGregor. Had some of the coal miners in the north-east taken up the contracts which Mr. MacGregor won—in other words, had they chosen to take those jobs—1,000 Durham miners would have had jobs thanks to Mr. MacGregor which they would not otherwise have had. I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman has the same confidence in Mr. Scargill. I understand that the right hon. Gentleman will not take part in the NUM rallies, and I can understand why.

As the right hon. Gentleman pointed out, coal is not especially referred to in the Gracious Speech. He will be aware that it contains mainly the legislative part of the Government's programme. However, energy policy is regularly debated in the House, and I therefore begin with some comments about the coal industry.

We meet today in the shadow of the longest industrial dispute for many years, and the House will expect me to begin by saying something about it. Since the last debate at the end of July there have been more than 100 further hours of negotiations between the NUM and the NCB, mostly under the auspices of ACAS. There have also been discussions between the NCB and NACODS, which clarified some important points and ended in an agreement acceptable to both sides. The NUM leaders have, however, repeatedly made it clear that they have not budged an inch from their original position that no pit should ever close except on grounds of exhaustion or safety.

In the debate on 31 July the Opposition urged the NCB to return to the colliery review procedure. The very next day the chairman of the NCB, Mr. MacGregor, made it clear in an official statement that the NCB had never departed from it.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Not true.

The Prime Minister: The Cortonwood proposals were made and the NUM was asked to attend a meeting. It did not do so. It did not go to that meeting although the other two unions in the industry were prepared to do so, and the hon. Gentleman knows it.

I remind the House that the colliery review procedure always envisaged the closure of uneconomic pits. In a circular in 1973 issued by the then general secretary of the NUM, Mr. Lawrence Daly, endorsing the procedure and explaining it to NUM branches, he stated:

"While the purpose of these meetings"—

the colliery review meetings—

"is to improve results and secure the maximum efficiency and optimum future for the industry and those who work in it, it was recognised that some pits would have to close, either through exhaustion or because of heavy losses or changing markets".

That was recognised right from the beginning of the colliery review procedure, and that was pointed out to the Select Committee on Energy in 1982.

Of course, it is the duty of the NCB, backed by the Government, to cushion the effects of such closures, to give hope to the communities in which they occur, and for the first time ever the NCB, under Mr. MacGregor, has said that any miner wishing to remain a miner will be able to do so. That is Mr. MacGregor's guarantee.

For those who wish to leave the industry, the Government have supported the NCB in providing the most generous early retirement terms ever. We have backed the Coal Board in setting up an enterprise company charged with encouraging new businesses in areas affected by pit closures, as was also done in the steel industry where

[The Prime Minister]

the redundancies were more concentrated. In the case of steel, BSC (Industry) has helped to create 20,000 new jobs with 16,000 more already in the pipeline. I hope that the new NCB company can be just as successful, although in a smaller way, because the redundancies in any area are far fewer.

Preserving steelworks with virtually no demand for their products, or pits that are becoming exhausted or running at a heavy loss, provides neither hope nor prospects for young people. It is far better to put money into the NCB enterprise company, which is what we are doing, and far better that we encourage inward investment, as my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland are constantly doing, with the result that large amounts of inward investment have been attracted.

The issue at the heart of this dispute is the right and duty of the NCB to manage in a way that secures the efficient development of the coal mining industry. That right and duty was recognised in the original nationalisation Act of 1946, as well as in "Plan for Coal" in 1974 and the tripartite agreements by which it was accepted, and the Coal Industry Acts of 1965 and 1977, both of which were passed by Labour Governments.

A settlement which preserves the NCB's right to manage and which meets the unions' reasonable concerns can be reached. The success of the negotiations between the NCB and NACODS proves it. Let me remind the House that as part of that settlement the NCB not only resolved a number of matters specific to NACODS, but addressed issues central to the dispute. Indeed, the NCB undertook, first, to reconsider its 6 March proposals, in the light of the changed circumstances of both supply and demand in the market for coal. Secondly, it undertook that the five pits about which the unions were particularly concerned would remain open, to be considered in common with all other pits under the colliery review procedure. Thirdly, it undertook to enhance the review procedure to include an independent review body to whose advice full weight would be given by the NCB.

I believe that the agreement between the NCB and NACODS is fair and reasonable. I do not believe that the NCB has room for any further movement. Even after 35 weeks of this strike, the leadership of the NUM has a choice: it can continue to manipulate the loyalties and exploit the fears of those who are one strike, knowing, as it does, the hardship and suffering that it is inflicting on their families; it can continue to wreak yet further damage on the coal industry to add to the £500 million in lost wages, the 20 lost faces, and the thousands of lost customers; or it can continue to refuse to budge an inch from its impossible demands. However, if it does those things it must know the suffering that it is inflicting, and it must know also that the NCB cannot and will not yield. The Leader of the Opposition talks about human feeling and suffering, but I ask him to think about the suffering which the NUM is inflicting on many of the striking miners and their families.

Instead of that, the NUM can accept the offer that lies on the table. It represents the best investment programme ever, the best ever guarantee of employment, the best ever early retirement terms and the best ever pay. I believe that scores of thousands of miners, in addition to the one third of miners who are now at work, are longing to accept this offer. This week alone, so far more than 1,200 miners have returned to work despite the violence and intimidation and despite the efforts to intensify the strike.

If the leaders of the National Union of Mineworkers, without consulting their membership and rejecting their desire for a ballot, persist in refusing this deal the House is entitled to ask whether they want to end this strike—or do they seek to prolong it for reasons which have little if anything to do with jobs and pay but have everything to do with an extra-parliamentary challenge to the House and to this Government? Why have they chosen to seek assistance from the Libyan Government, who used their embassy for murder on the streets of London? The Leader of the Opposition was right to condemn this sinister alliance, and what he said will be endorsed by all right-minded people.

There is no industrial reason why this strike should go on for one day longer. For the sake of the mining industry, for the sake of the mining communities and for the sake of every miner and his family, I say end it now.

This strike, pursued by the NUM in the name of jobs, is in fact destroying jobs. If customers cannot rely on a secure supply of coal, they will not burn it. They will turn to other fuel. But the Labour party has supported this strike no matter what the cost, no matter what the damage and no matter how many jobs are lost. By their words, the Opposition denounce unemployment. So do we. By their deeds, they help to create it. They forfeit any right to lecture the Government on the creation of jobs.

The Gracious Speech reaffirms that the Government

"remains deeply concerned about unemployment and will continue policies designed to achieve better opportunities for employment."

We would all like to return——

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): The Prime Minister quoted from the 1944 Coalition White Paper on unemployment. It is her responsibility to tell the House whether she accepts, as that Government did, the primary aim of maintaining a high and stable level of employment. Is that the policy of this Government? If the right hon. Lady agreed that it was, she would carry a great deal more support in some of the other areas of the Government's economic policy.

The Prime Minister: We would all like to return, as I was about to say, to a low level of unemployment. The first paragraph of that White Paper says that the Government should

"accept as one of their primary aims . . . the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment after the war . . . For employment cannot be created by Act of Parliament or by Government action alone . . . the success of the policy outlined in this Paper will ultimately depend on the understanding and support of the community as a whole—and especially on the efforts of employers and workers in industry; for without a rising standard of industrial efficiency we cannot achieve a high level of employment combined with a rising standard of living."

That White Paper accepted that a partnership was required if one was to defeat the problem of unemployment. It set out many factors which have been totally ignored. Had they been accepted it would have been easier to keep jobs, easier to be competitive and easier to create jobs in the future. As I said at my own party conference, I accept most parts of this Paper—pretty nearly all of it except those aspects which over time have changed.

We would all like to return to a low level of unemployment.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

The Prime Minister: In the debate last week the Leader of the Opposition gave us his miracle cure.

Mr. Ashley *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue. I have quite a long way to go, but I shall give way later to him.

In the debate last week the Leader of the Opposition gave us his miracle cure. It was increased public spending, not by taxation, but by increased borrowing. He argues that that will have the effect of increasing demand and public investment and so produce more jobs.

Let us examine those points one by one. In the mid-1950s and early 1960s, unemployment was only 1·5 per cent. That was a time when public expenditure as a share of national income was only about one third. Between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s unemployment rose to 12·5 per cent. and the share of public expenditure climbed to between 40 and 45 per cent. If higher public spending could solve unemployment, there would have been no problem for many years now. But it cannot, and it has not in any country. Those countries which have been most successful in maintaining employment — the United States and Japan — take a far lower proportion of national income in public expenditure than we do.

If we were to increase borrowing not only would we tend to increase interest rates, whereas they have gone down today—to increase them would be damaging in itself, especially to small business and construction—but we should be diverting into the public sector resources which are now going into private sector investment. Private sector investment has gone up in real terms by some 15 per cent. over the past year in manufacturing industries and by nearly 13 per cent. in service industries.

Mr. Kinnock: Rubbish.

The Prime Minister: Apparently the Leader of the Opposition does not believe the official statistics of staff in the Civil Service. I repeat that private sector investment has gone up by some 15 per cent. over the past year in manufacturing industries and by nearly 13 per cent. in service industries.

Mr. Ashley *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister is not giving way. Unless she does so, the right hon. Gentleman cannot intervene.

The Prime Minister: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman in a moment, but first let me come to the end of this section of my speech.

The Leader of the Opposition said that he wanted a strong manufacturing base. So do I. I want a strong service industry base as well. But I was saying that private sector investment had gone up in real terms by 15 per cent. over the past year in manufacturing industries and by nearly 13 per cent. in service industries. Do we really want to take away that investment from the private sector to put it in the public sector? Do we really want to lose the jobs that that investment provides? Those who put forward this recipe conveniently forget the jobs that would be destroyed.

Mr. Ashley: Does the Prime Minister recognise that these excuses have never convinced the Opposition but that the new factor now is that they are not convincing her own supporters? They are now beginning to be vociferous in their complaints about the Government's policies. What action does the Prime Minister intend to take to meet the complaints of Conservative Members? I assure the right hon. Lady that they will not allow their political necks to be wrung in an election on this issue. They will wring her neck first.

The Prime Minister: Obviously I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. I remind him that it was my arguments and policies to which President Mitterrand turned when his own Socialist ones did not work.

Mr. Kinnock: What about President Reagan?

The Prime Minister; I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the proportion of national income taken in public expenditure in the United States is very much lower than is taken in Great Britain.

As for the notion that we need to increase demand, the right hon. Gentleman knows that there is no shortage of demand in the country. Retail sales are up by 8 per cent. in value on this time last year, and total spending in the economy is also up by 8 per cent. in money terms. There is no shortage of demand. The trouble is that the supply is being met not from this country but by more competitive industries overseas in some spheres.

Labour's formula offers no solution. I suspect that the right hon. Gentleman knows this, for he tried— *[Interruption.]* The Opposition do not like to listen, especially to facts and figures. They regard debate as something with which they agree and not as something with which they disagree. When they disagree they try to stop it being heard.

I suspect that the right hon. Gentleman knows that his formula offers no solution, because he tried to make the formula more acceptable last week by calling for reflation of £2·3 billion compared with the much more astronomic figure at the general election of something like 10 times that amount. The British people did not believe him then and they do not believe him now.

If the medicine is no good in the first place, what is the point of just reducing the dose? However, there are ways to save jobs, to help to create jobs, and to have a higher level of employment, but they raise issues which the Opposition would prefer not to face. They represent choices which the Government have not shirked and will not shirk.

Now I shall take up the matter of pay in relation to output. Of course everyone would like more pay, but if we are to have German or American standards of pay we must have German and American standards of efficiency and output per person first. That is why I always refer to pay in relation to output. After years of prices and incomes policies people came to think that they had an automatic right to an increase in pay regardless of output, and the increase in pay went straight into inflation and not into extra output.

Indeed, unemployment is caused by paying ourselves more than the value of what we produce. So said a former Leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), in 1976. He said:

> "We must ask ourselves unflinchingly what is the cause of high unemployment. Quite simply and unequivocally it is caused by paying ourselves more than the value of what we produce. There are no scapegoats."

[The Prime Minister]

That is what a past Leader of the Labour party said.

"There are no scapegoats. This is as true in a mixed economy under a Labour Government as it is under capitalism or Communism. It is an absolute fact of life which no Government, be it left or right, can alter".

The right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) knows that that was sound sense which a Government, be it Left or Right, had to operate.

If wages are too high in relation to what people will pay for goods, they will take their custom elsewhere and jobs will be lost. Time and again we have seen British firms priced out of the market—in cars, ships, motor bikes, washing machines and electronic goods. So there is a choice—of pay in relation to output. It is one which employees and management have to make. There are signs that in some industries, despite the yelping of the Opposition, the message is getting home. Yesterday there was some news that workers earning £170 a week at a furniture factory had voted for a 5 per cent. pay cut in an effort to create more jobs and to save some jobs of their fellow workers. Sense is coming on the shop floor if not in the Opposition.

For young people—the right hon. Gentleman, like me, would like more jobs for young people—lower pay also helps to win more jobs. For example, employers find that the young workers scheme has enabled them to take on more young people. Is it not better to take on three 17-year-olds, paying them £50 a week each, than two paid £75 a week each, with the other one still out of work? Is it not better to train people for a year under the youth training scheme at £26·50 a week than to leave them unskilled and unqualified with less chance of a job?

The results are encouraging. Unemployment among school leavers has fallen over the past year. A far larger proportion of those leaving youth training service schemes are finding jobs than under earlier schemes, but the sad truth is that some unions have blocked opportunities for training and employment for unemployed youngsters by demanding higher pay and more allowances. Faced with a choice, those unions chose higher unemployment rather than lower pay.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Is the Prime Minister now telling the House, endorsing the statement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that she believes in a cut in wages?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening. It is pay in relation to output that is the critical factor. Unit labour costs in Britain are still going up at a higher rate than in the United States and Japan. I am afraid that unless we get unit labour costs down it does not augur well for our industry. Pay in relation to output is the critical factor.

The pay factor alone is not enough. The hon. Gentleman will recall the words of the White Paper that I read out, that

"without a rising standard of industrial efficiency we cannot achieve a high level of employment".

I use the term "greater efficiency" in all its many aspects. That means doing away with old labour practices, as has been done, for example, in the Tyne ship repair yards which have been privatised; working inconvenient hours if necessary; being the first to accept new technology and to exploit it to the full, not fighting its introduction and use every inch of the way; and constantly developing the products and services for the markets of tomorrow.

Of course, the major innovations of the past displaced existing products and the jobs of the workers who made them, but each in its own way opened up vast new opportunities and created many new jobs. The same will be true of the inventions and ideas of today, whether in manufacturing or in service industries.

Those things, by their very nature, cannot be done by the Government, but the actions of the Government could hinder the necessary development in the public sector by subsidising yesterday's industries at the expense of tomorrow's. The goods that we are interested in are those which have a relevance for tomorrow's world.

If the Government cannot do all those things, they can cut regulations, reduce controls, increase competition and diminish the financial overheads arising from rates and taxation. This year the increase in local authority rates has been the lowest for a decade, thanks to our legislation. The national insurance surcharge—the Labour party's tax on jobs—was finally abolished last month.

Yes, the route to more jobs does present unpalatable choices for the Opposition. The right hon. Gentleman's party backs every pay demand and every strike, no matter how unreasonable or how damaging. It now resists change, whether the transition from high to low cost pits, or the efficient use of new technology, and it belittles the opportunity presented by the service industries. His is the party which, to cap it all, would put up personal taxes on wealth creators and raise inflation and so nullify the advantage which our industries have so painfully won in the past five years.

We can return to a high level of employment only if we face the difficult choices that I have outlined. It also requires the unceasing pursuit of sound financial policies by the Government to bring inflation down and to limit public spending. It requires, too, a commitment to free enterprise which is wealth creating, rather than a commitment to the expansion of the public sector, which is wealth consuming.

As the Gracious Speech shows, we have therefore pursued a programme of returning state industry to the private sector, with vigour and determination. Eleven major companies and a number of other enterprises have so far been restored to private ownership. Shortly the public will receive a prospectus for British Telecom setting out the terms on which the largest ever transfer of a company from state control is being offered. This Session will carry forward the process of opening up the coach and bus industry to competition. We hope to see the return to the private sector of British Airways, a company which has responded magnificently to the spur of competition and to the prospects ahead.

Mr. Bell: The right hon. Lady is tired.

The Prime Minister: Very far from it. Please do not let the hon. Gentleman cherish any such hopes.

The Gracious Speech refers to a major Bill that we shall be brining forward very soon to abolish the six metropolitan councils and the Greater London council. We want local government to be closer to the people. For the metropolitan councils, that means that the metropolitan districts will be the local authorities and for London it means that the boroughs will be the local authorities.

I believe that even the Opposition are not seriously in favour of retaining the metropolitan councils, but to them the GLC is different, even though it accounts for only 11 per cent. of local government spending in London. Nevertheless, the GLC is spending £10 million of ratepayers' money — £7 million this year alone — on trying to persuade us of the value of its services—not, of course, housing, because most of that was transferred to the boroughs some years ago; not, of course, education, because a directly elected Inner London education authority and the outer boroughs will do that; not law and order, because the Metropolitan police do that; not the tubes and buses, because London Regional Transport does that; not ambulances, because the local health authorities do that; and not rubbish collection or libraries, because the boroughs do that work.

The GLC is spending £7 million this year on propaganda. That is more than the total government budget of the city of Oxford, which is £6·5 million, and of the city of Durham, which is £6 million. The GLC has become an intolerable burden on London's ratepayers. Its rate has risen by more than 100 per cent. in the last three years, but its spending days are nearly over. With Parliament's approval, it will come to an end on 31 March 1986.

The Gracious Speech sets out our approach to foreign affairs and defence. I begin by reporting to the House that, together with the Leader of the Opposition and the Leaders of other parties, I have just returned from Delhi where we mourned with the people of India at Mrs. Gandhi's funeral. History and friendship gave us a specially close feeling for India. We all wish the new Prime Minister well in the great task of reconciliation which will surely be needed in the days and months ahead.

We are very much aware that we open this Session of Parliament on the day of perhaps the most important election in the Western world. Once that election is over, many tasks that have inevitably been held up will be resumed—in particular, the lessening of tension between East and West.

The Gracious Speech speaks of our working continually for a "greater atmosphere of trust" between the two sides. That will be our aim. It is the reason why we shall in the coming months be welcoming two senior representatives of the Soviet Union to Britain.

Mr. Gorbachev has accepted the invitations of the chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and of the British group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to visit Britain in December. He will also be calling on members of the Government and the Opposition and other party leaders. Mr. Gromyko has also said that he hopes to visit London next year. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and I look forward to seeing them both. We shall hope during their visits to take forward the search for ways to reduce the burden of armaments.

With our Western partners, we have made far-reaching but practical proposals in every arms control negotiation. At Stockholm, Vienna and Geneva, it is the West which has made the running. So far, the response from the Soviet Union, there and elsewhere, has been unforthcoming. The Soviet Union proposed talks on limiting weapons in space, but then refused to take yes for an answer.

When the Soviet Government find the political will to respond positively and to resume their empty chair at the nuclear negotiating table they will meet a ready response. We want security at a lower level of weapons and at a lower cost — provided always that reductions are balanced and verifiable.

This Government will not put at risk our national security or peace by giving up our nuclear defences while our greatest potential enemy keeps its nuclear defences. We should remember that the possession of the nuclear deterrent has prevented not only nuclear war, but conventional war. At one time, that used to be common ground between the parties. Indeed, after the last war, in the 1940s, it was the Labour Government of Mr. Attlee who first provided Britain with nuclear weapons. In the 1960s and 1970s, Labour Governments under Lord Wilson and under the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth maintained Polaris and later confirmed the decision to modernise it with Chevaline.

In 1976 the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said

> "It is not and never has been my view that unilateral renunciation would promote peace in the world. — [*Official Report*, 19 May 1976; Vol. 911, c. 1389.]

In 1981 the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) said:

> "The only real answer to the nuclear threat is multilateral disarmament and not unilateral gestures."

Over the past three or four decades, Labour, both in government and in opposition, affirmed again and again that nuclear weapons were crucial to the defence of the West and the preservation of peace. Well, what has changed? It is not the defence needs of the West, but the Labour party itself. Now, not content with getting rid of Britain's own nuclear deterrent, the Labour party is committed to the unconditional removal of all United States' nuclear weapons and nuclear bases from British soil and British waters. So, to our American allies, Labour would be saying, "We do not want your nuclear weapons on our soil, but we still expect you to help to defend our freedom."

The Opposition's policies would hand the Soviet Union a major military, political and propaganda advantage in return for nothing. They would greatly diminish the value and credibility of Britain's contribution to the Alliance, sabotage the close relationship between Britain and the United States and strike at the basis of the peace and security which NATO has brought Europe for the past 35 years.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): If our relationship with the American allies is so close, why did they vote against us on the Falklands in the United Nations?

The Prime Minister: I am talking about NATO. I make it clear that we believe in the NATO alliance, in honouring its policies and in staying loyal to our American allies. We are very grateful for the tremendous effort that they put into the defence of Europe.

As the Gracious Speech says, the Government consider their highest priority to be the "maintenance of national security" and we will uphold the strategy of NATO and honour our obligations to our principal ally. That is not true of the Opposition.

I believe that in the coming Session we shall have to face a matter that lies at the heart of parliamentary government. Many of the measures in the Gracious Speech will be keenly contested. No one can complain about that. The Opposition can and will criticise, oppose, amend or

[The Prime Minister]

delay any Bill, but once that Bill has been passed through Parliament to become law, that law must be obeyed equally and by all.

Disagree as Governments and Oppositions will on policy, we were united on that constitutional convention. I fear that in recent months that convention has been under threat. As we saw only last month in Blackpool, there are some in the Labour party who hold the law and the courts to be nothing more than obstacles in the way of their political objectives. On Wednesday 3 October the Labour conference passed a resolution giving its official backing to lawbreakers. The resolution promised to support local councils

"forced to break the law as a result of the Tory Government's policies".

Forced to break the law! In a democracy, where people can vote at least once every five years to change the law through the ballot box, no one is

"forced to break the law".

That is not the language of those who believe in democracy, nor of those who believe in law.

The Gracious Speech, like its predecessors, depends upon that fundamental constitutional convention which, because of the attitude of some in the Labour party, is in danger of breaking down. This year let it be seen that those who deny the duty to uphold the rule of law, those who use violence for political ends, and those who deny the ascendancy of the ballot box and the supremacy of Parliament find no support in any part of this honourable House.

4.29 pm

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I readily join the other party leaders in congratulating the mover and seconder of the Loyal Address. I have some sympathy for the hon. Member for Boothferry (Sir P. Bryan), the mover, in his complaint against the Boundary Commission. In my case, it managed to reduce the size of my constituency, yet still find a longer name for it than Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles. I thought that his truest remark was that, when he goes back to Boothferry, he finds that people are worried that we are spending time discussing issues that are "not uppermost" in their minds. If he found that worrying before, I suspect that he will find it even more worrying after reading the text of the Gracious Speech.

The seconder, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), described himself as junior, but he could have fooled me. I hope that we shall enjoy many more such contributions from him during this Parliament before Lloyd George's descendants duly get rid of him after all their efforts.

We have heard the shortest Gracious Speech for years. I suspect that that is because it does not address itself to either of the two major problems confronting our nation: the chronic level of unemployment, and the increasingly divided nature of our society. Indeed, the Gracious Speech is so thin that the Government must be suffering from the political equivalent of anorexia nervosa. There is no sign of the Government having any confidence in the direction that they are taking.

An even stranger feature of the Gracious Speech is that a textual analysis shows an extraordinary habit throughout of placing unexceptional phrases at the beginning of sentences or paragraphs, leaving the trail of disaster to the end. I shall give three examples. On the first page, the Speech says:

"My Government will continue fully to discharge their obligations to the people of the Falkland Islands, while seeking more normal relations between this country and Argentina."

Nothing more than "more normal relations" when we are still in a state of war with Argentina?

On the second page, the Gracious Speech states:

"While noting that the numbers of people in work are steadily rising, my Government remains deeply concerned about unemployment."

Further on it states:

"Firm control of public spending will be maintained."

But, of course, later in that paragraph the Government are searching for policies that will "sustain rising living standards".

I begin to think that if the Prime Minister had been asked to describe in one sentence the tragedy of the Titanic, she would have said, "While the band played brilliantly in the ballroom, unfortunately the ship sank." That is the tone of the whole speech. If she had been captain of the Titanic when it struck the iceberg, she and her first mate, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, would have tried to calm the passengers by assuring them that the ship had stopped only to take on ice.

The whole tone of the Gracious Speech is one of suffocating complacency and irrelevance. The legislation on the GLC and the metropolitan counties will certainly occupy a great deal of the time of this House and the other place. It is a sign of this Government's genius that in five years in office they have succeeded in elevating two obscure regional Left-wing figures, Ken Livingstone and Arthur Scargill, into national folk figures, loved or hated depending on one's views. That legislation, which will occupy so much of our time, is a total distraction from the real problems that face the country, and which should face the Government.

There is nothing in the Gracious Speech to give hope that the Government are making a first attempt to tackle unemployment via a programme of badly needed public investment in our infrastructure. A few moments ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) interrupted the Prime Minister to ask her whether she was committed to the statement in the 1944 White Paper that progress could be achieved only by a

"high and stable level of employment".

The right hon. Lady dodged that question, and instead quoted another passage from the White Paper, saying that it could not be achieved "by Government action alone". But no one has ever said that it could. We are saying that it certainly cannot be achieved without Government action, and that is the criticism that is increasingly coming from all quarters.

I invite the Prime Minister to pause and reflect on the stark contrast between the tone of both her speeches and those of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and that of the speeches made yesterday at the CBI conference. There is the world of reality. There speaker after speaker made speeches contrery to the prevailing wisdom at Nos. 10 and 11 Downing street. One speaker said:

"Government is not convinced that manufacturing matters".

Another said:

"Don't let skilled building workers rot in dole queues".

Yet another said:

"Cuts in personal taxation will not regenerate industry".

Those are the experienced voices of this country's industrial life. In yesterday's debate at the CBI

conference, only one speaker was brave enough to repeat the sort of nostrums in the Gracious Speech, and he was greeted with groans.

We on these Benches have repeatedly advocated the need for a controlled and costed stimulus to economic recovery from the Government. We have also said that it is not a low wage strategy that the Government need in order to get industry to recover, but an incomes strategy which relates pay to increased productivity. The Government should take the matter in hand and encourage the development of co-operatives to play a greater part in our industrial strategy. They should encourage employee shareholding and the distribution of profits as a greater part of the wage packet.

As long as the Government conduct an industrial society in which the only interest of the average working man is the size of the wage packet at the end of the week, they cannot be surprised if that sole interest is sometimes pushed to ridiculous lengths. There should be a basic change in the Government's attitude. They cannot bludgeon people into change. They need to be persuaded. Through taxation policies and legislation, the Government should give the lead.

There is nothing in the Gracious Speech to give hope to our young people in International Youth Year. I have drawn attention before to the fact that two competitor Governments in the European Community—France and Germany—who hold conflicting political views, have engaged in deliberate policies of ensuring that all school leavers, all teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19 have the choice of continuing in education in school, of a place on a training course or of a job. That has been the German Government's policy for some years, and it is also the declared policy of the new Prime Minister of France. We are light years away from that commitment, never mind its achievement. Instead, in parallel with rising youth unemployment there is a rising crime wave. I am convinced that there is a direct link between the two. Indeed, everyone seems to be convinced except the Prime Minister. When Prince Charles made that observation, the Prime Minister said that his words were anodyne. But it is an extraordinary state of affairs when members of the royal family seem to be more in tune with the reality of what is happening to our young people than members of the Government.

The sad and horrendous problem of growing drug trafficking, with its effect upon the young, flows from that. Hon. Members should try to unite to examine the issue and to devise policies to counteract that threat. But as long as there is mass idleness among the young, we cannot be surprised that the drug menace grows.

Let us see what the Gracious Speech says about education. There is a vague sentence about a commitment to raise standards. How can the Government say that when this year 22,000 qualified school leavers have been denied places in higher education simply because of the cuts? That is not raising standards. When I looked for something specific on education, I found the scheme for allowing parents of children in public sector education to reject caning. It is a scheme that is so unworkable that it has been denounced by every teaching authority, and could have been dreamed up only by the Secretary of State for Education and Science. Indeed, it is so unworkable that parents who want their children to be caned will have to send them to private sector schools. The next Conservative manifesto will probably promise that flogging will be tax-deductible.

Where the Queen's Speech is specific it is disastrous. Legislation for buses is proposed. We supported the changes to increase competition on bus routes just as we supported the provision which allows people to buy or rent telephone equipment outside the British Telecom monopoly. The trouble is that the Government do not know where to stop.

The White Paper is regarded by local authorities of all political colours in all the rural areas as potentially disastrous. Chaos will be caused. An end will come to a system which has operated over many years under which the profitable routes subsidise the unprofitable. Where will the money come from to support the unprofitable services? It cannot come fom the rates, because such spending is being cut by the Government. It cannot come from the fare payers, because, if fares go up, services will be withdrawn. It cannot come from a free-for-all among bus companies, because they will want to take over only the profitable routes.

I warn the Government that their proposals will meet with resistance not only from their own Back Benchers but from another place which in the past has taken an interest in safeguarding services in rural areas.

Turning to foreign affairs, I wish that the Government would recognise the fundamental change that has taken place in Argentina since the tragic conflict. A new democratic Government now rule. Four times in the last 20 years, twice to military regimes, Governments of both major parties in Britain have publicly acknowledged their willingness to cede the Falkland Islands' sovereignty to Argentina.

Today Britain has a vague policy, and the Government's intention is not clear. About 200,000 people of British descent live in Argentina—the largest British-descended population outside the Commonwealth—and 17,000 of them are United Kingdom citizens. That is 10 times the population of the Falkland Islands.

Of course we should look after the Falkland Islanders' interests, but their long-term interests will be served only through a realistic arrangement with their mainland neighbours. It is dishonest for the Government to pretend that they can give independence to lands which are not capable of independence. That was the practical theory behind the Hong Kong agreement. The Government knew tha once the New Territories lease came to an end, the rest of the colony could not sustain itself independently. I give credit to the Government for the negotiations. They secured the best interests of nearly 5 million people in Hong Kong.

Surely it is time for us to act sensibly towards the new democratic Government in Argentina. Vice-President Martinez, whom I met a few weeks ago in Latin America, made it clear that they are sensitive to the need to allow time to heal the wounds between our two countries. Our quarrel was with the military regime, not the Argentine people. At a time when public spending is being squeezed, it is ridiculous that our people should have to spend £700 million in the current year because we are not prepared to have proper conversations to achieve an internationally guaranteed political settlement for the future of the islands.

The Prime Minister was right to refer to the miners' strike, although there is nothing about it in the Queen's Speech. The right hon. Lady must now rue the day that she

[Mr. David Steel]

appointed Mr. Ian MacGregor. I dwell on the matter not as a personal criticism of Mr. MacGregor, but because some of us said at the time that the new president of the National Union of Mineworkers was hellbent on picking a political quarrel with the Government. That was common knowledge. The Prime Minister must accept responsibility for what has happened since.

In the last few weeks the incompetent has been in pursuit of the intransigent. That has been the characteristic of the series of negotiations. The National Coal Board has made two major concessions. It has withdrawn the five-pit closure programme and accepted the need for an independent review body. Mr. Scargill has shown no corresponding sign of give.

In such a situation one would normally expect an elected Government to be able to look to other trade union leaders for assistance. Unfortunately, the truth is that this Government so soured relations with the trade union movement over the GCHQ affair that they have not been able to ask sensible trade union leaders to bring pressure to bear on the leader of the NUM. That is a tragedy of the Government's own making. Let not the Government pretend that they can get away with responsibility for this disastrous dispute. It is disastrous for our economy and for the fabric of society in many mining areas.

In the meantime, Mr. Scargill is to be seen shuffling millions of pounds of his union's funds around the Isle of Man and Ireland while his members' families suffer. He is as big a financial baron as any company chairman in the land.

At Cyn Heidre colliery in South Wales, workers have started to go back, only to find that the NUM has decided to withdraw safety cover thereby putting 5,000 jobs permanently at risk. That knocks a hole in Mr. Scargill's claim that the dispute is about securing jobs. Such activity can only be damaging to jobs.

The strike is political. The Government have watched a series of own goals from their own side, from the closure of Cortonwood to the treatment of Messrs Eaton and Kirk. The story is not a happy one. I hope that we can look to a brighter future.

At one time the Government could have expected the Labour party to help in such a dispute, but that is no longer possible. Leadership by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) is not by clear direction, but by previous engagements.

I am not surprised that the Government continue to try to prop up the Labour party as the main or official Opposition. They believe it better to preserve for the Labour party all the trappings and privileges of official Opposition, knowing that they pose no threat. After all, in medieval courts licensed jesters were allowed to criticise the king because they posed no threat to the monarch's power. Others would be beheaded for their criticism.

The cosy arrangements in the House against which we protested this afternoon and against which we shall continue to protest are part and parcel of the effort to ensure that a weak Labour party is seen or perceived outside to be the only Opposition in the House. It is not. We on the alliance Benches increasingly represent the mass of popular opinion which rejects class divided politics and a divided society. We represent those who are worried about a Government who are prepared to use their power for the meretricious purposes of Zola Budd and her friends, but not for those who are less well off and whose families are divided as a result of their legislation.

The Government have a uniquely appalling record. They have caused record unemployment, record lows in the value of sterling and record balance of payments deficits. Literally, they are bad for the country. The programme announced today does nothing to remedy that. Sooner or later the Government must face an acceptable alternative. The Labour party cannot provide it, but we will.

4.48 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): I warmly welcome a number of proposals in the Gracious Speech. Although it is not the most important, I particularly welcome the provision for holiday voting, for which I have pressed for many years. The content of the Gracious Speech, and the tone of the Prime Minister's speech in reply to the most elegant performance so far by the Leader of the Opposition, show clearly that the Government intend to hold their course through the choppy waters ahead. They can do so secure in the knowledge that their strength in the House is unassailable and that every reliable indicator of public opinion shows that their support in the country is holding up amazingly well.

The course upon which the Government are so unshakeably set steers well away from consensus in British politics. If that means an end to the leftward ratchet by which successive Conservative Government contented themselves with slowing down the march towards Socialism, I welcome it.

The consensus also means that certain shared principles underlie the usual party conflict, and I wish to say a few words about that in the light of the perils that threaten our system of parliamentary democracy, both from without and within.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), in his entertaining speech, referred to the remarks of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). I join him in paying tribute to what I thought to be one of the most eloquent, wise and courageous definitions of the parameters of our parliamentary democracy. The right hon. Gentleman said:

> "From the perspective of democracy the differences between the two sides of this House are as wide and as deep as a great gulf. From the perspective of terrorism they are an imperceptible crack in the rock of democracy."

Earlier, he said:

> "the only way we get rid of a Government in Britain is by the ballot box."—[*Official Report*, 22 October 1984; Vol. 65, c. 441-2.]

It is my contention that the crack is even narrower and less clear-cut than it sometimes appears. It is true that there is a substantial difference between the parties on economic policy, and especially on policies for reducing unemployment, but even that difference is not all that it appears. Many Conservative Members, like the CBI, want the Government to embark upon a much more ambitious programme of public works as a means of creating jobs, even if that means forgoing cuts in personal taxation. Many of us believe that cuts in personal taxation have a disproportionate effect in attracting imports from overseas.

Conversely, many Opposition Members, in their heart of hearts, really do not want those in work to have to make too many sacrifices to finance jobs for those out of work.

In a distasteful but perceptive article in *The Standard* recently, Brian Walden wrote of the new breed of Tory supporters as the

"upwardly mobile working classes who do not want their taxes expended upon those who resent their little successes."

I believe, and deeply regret, that the main political parties —however much they may differ on some issues—are all too often at one in pandering to those rather nasty sentiments. In that, they are all too largely supported by the trade unions.

There is one other respect where the gap between the parties is much smaller than publicly appears, and that is on Mr. Scargill's now collapsing political strike. The Labour party, through a mixture of cowardice and misplaced loyalty, has allowed itself to be dragged in chains behind Mr. Scargill's chariot. It knows, although it dare not say so, that its only chance of escape is for the National Coal Board to block the road along which the chariot is travelling and for the strike to collapse, as it is beginning to do and as it would have done many months ago had anyone other than Mr. MacGregor been at the head of the NCB.

I know that that may be unfair, as I have the greatest admiration for Mr. MacGregor and his qualities. However, what matters are not his qualities but his reputation. The appointment of Mr. MacGregor provided Mr. Scargill with the pretext that he wanted to launch a plausible political strike. The strike will collapse, with or without Mr. MacGregor, leaving the NUM in a terrible state of disarray.

I ask the Government to remember that those miners who have so bravely continued to work during the dispute, who have been damned by the leadership of the NUM, and who deserve so well of this party and this Government, still regard themselves as loyal members of their union. For them, it is still their union. I hope that the Government, in their hour of deserved triumph—which I believe will come quite soon—will not forget that.

I wish to conclude with some wise words from a much derided Tory Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, when he was facing industrial unrest as bitter as that which faces us today. He said:

"If there are those who want to fight the class war, we will take up the challenge and we will beat them by the hardness of our heads and the largeness of our hearts."

The Government, if not the NCB, have shown an admirably hard head throughout the dispute. I hope that they will very soon be ready to show the largeness of their heart.

4.56 pm

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I am glad that the Prime Minister is still in the Chamber, as I wish to leave one thought with her. She may not be aware that, when the PLO fled to Libya, Colonel Gaddafi, to finance its upkeep, decreed that every Libyan worker should be awarded a pay decrease of 10 per cent. I wonder whether the right hon. Lady expects the National Union of Mineworkers to bring back a similar proposal from Libya.

I am glad that the Prime Minister stressed the importance of obedience to the law and respect for it. I do not think I am being partisan in saying that. I would put it more firmly than the right hon. Lady, and say that I hope that all hon. Members feel that we have an obligation to obey the law. Although it is true that no citizen can be compelled, or should be expected, to make a defective law work, every citizen has an obligation to obey the law.

I welcome the passage in the Queen's Speech that states:

"The security forces will continue to receive my Government's full support."

During my first speech in the House in 1971, I warned that we were then seeing the first demonstration of urban guerrila warfare in western Europe. I fully understood why some poured scorn on my remarks. They believed that Northern Ireland terrorism was about bad housing, unemployment, social deprivation and the restriction of local government franchise to ratepayers. After all, that had been the practice in the greater and larger island of Great Britain until recent times. Opinion in England seems to be moving back in that direction, which may not be a bad thing.

In 1971, "reform" was the "in" word. People said that, if the alleged grievances were removed, the terrorists would become good citizens. Unfortunately, the opposite proved to be the case. Terrorists have been encouraged by what were thought to be concessions, and what were seen by them to be concessions so that, as each objective was attained, another was produced. If today certain constitutional parties are in electoral difficulties, it is because the IRA has been able to claim that its long-term objectives are shared by those constitutional parties and that its methods of murder and bloodshed are likely to produce the muscle for all those in constitutional parties or in no party who share its objectives.

Perhaps it is only in recent weeks that the true nature of Irish terrorism has become revealed. It can now be seen that the terrorists are not democrats who are in a hurry. They have nothing in common with democracy and their use of the word "democracy" smacks of the hypocrisy that we sense when we hear about "people's democracies" east of the iron curtain. We know that the leaders of those "democracies" have managed to acquire status and the seats of power only because they have suppressed every vestige of democracy in the unfortunate countries over which they rule. That will come as no surprise to those who have been aware of all manner of unsavoury connections between the IRA and Marxist regimes, not to mention its links with instruments of anarchy as such as the PLO, the Red Brigades and the Baader Meinhof group.

The recent tragic happenings in Brighton and elsewhere show that all these organisations take the view that, if they do not like the verdict of the ballot box, they will be prepared to annihilate those in authority who have been given that authority by the ballot box. I think that we should all be encouraged by the statement in the Gracious Speech that Her Majesty's Government

"will make vigorous efforts to combat international terrorism."

It is about time that we saw the activities of the IRA and other such organisations in that context. We have a right to expect other friendly nations to co-operate in that endeavour with Her Majesty's Government and to do so as a matter of duty and honour. There should be no strings attached to that co-operation.

Another passage in the Gracious Speech refers to the Government's intention to promote legislation

"to prevent personation at elections in Northern Ireland."

My colleagues and I have been giving much thought to the matter, and we have made certain suggestions. We recognise that it is not easy to find foolproof remedies and we are prepared to accept that safeguards may be necessary, but it should be recognised that they may be necessary in various areas throughout the United

[Mr. James Molyneaux]

Kingdom. It is not so long ago that we were provided with illustrations of personation having taken place on a significant scale on the island of Great Britain. It is in those areas as well as in Northern Ireland that the franchise has been abused in recent elections.

It is the acceptance and provision of safeguards against abuse which strengthens the claim of Northern Ireland electors to retain exactly the same franchise, the same opportunity to vote and the same voting rights as their fellow citizens in the rest of the United Kingdom. It would be intolerable if the principle of uniformity of franchise were withdrawn because of an exaggerated idea of the scale, impact and effect of personation in various parts of the United Kingdom. My colleagues and I do not accept the claim that personation has grown in Northern Ireland to a level at which public confidence is in danger. I doubt whether personation has materially affected the outcome of elections to this place, to the Northern Ireland Assembly or to local councils in Northern Ireland.

We do not accept that the electoral rise of Sinn Fein is something new of which we should be terrified. I refer to the voting figures for the 1921 election for the first Parliament of Northern Ireland. The proportional representation system was used in that election and Sinn Fein candidates received 104,000 votes, 20 per cent. of the total votes cast. The 1982 election for the Northern Ireland Assembly used the same system for PR and Sinn Fein received only 64,000 votes. Its vote fell from 20 per cent. to well under 11 per cent. It is important that we bear these facts in mind.

In this short contribution to the debate, I have dealt with two major matters that bear on Northern Ireland. There will be occasions to debate and consider many other issues affecting Northern Ireland, but the two to which I have referred are interlocked. Terrorism will be encouraged if the Government are seen to be treating Northern Ireland differently under the franchise, which is the foundation of democracy. My party has placed on record its recognition of its responsibility to persuade the minority in Northern Ireland that Ulster is its province as well. If the Government proceed to implement the policies which are outlined in the Gracious Speech and do so along the lines which I have suggested, they will do much to convince the people of Northern Ireland, Protestant and Catholic alike, that the United Kingdom is theirs as well.

5.7 pm

Mr. Christopher Murphy (Welwyn Hatfield): I welcome the Government's determination, as set out in the Gracious Speech, to pursue the policies on which they were elected, but I sound a note of dissapointment that more emphasis has not been placed on conservation and development, although I recognise that protection of the environment is mentioned.

During recent years we have come to recognise more fully the essential problems of urban decay and rural erosion, and the instigation of land-use surveys has focused the human eye on the scale of the difficulties. In the inner cities are areas akin to the astronomers's black hole—a vast nothingness into which public money has been poured only to vanish almost without trace. At the same time, like the theory of the ever-expanding universe, there has been a continuing outward movement of the town and suburbia. The clear message of such focusing is that development must be telescoped — in the sense of closing, not opening, the instrument.

The green belt is a concept of immense value in ensuring the protection of the still rural areas that are under pressure from urban sprawl. It is my intention to do all that I can to protect it, especially on behalf of my constituents. I am strongly of the view that once land is established as part of the green belt, it should stay that way. In my constituency that means land around North Mimms between Hatfield and Potters Bar, around Welwyn and Wheathamstead, between Welwyn Garden City and Stevenage, in other parishes, such as Essendon, Ayot St. Lawrence, Ayot St. Peter, or on the outskirts of Hatfield or Welwyn Garden City. It means also that all residents will know where they stand. What is a green and pleasant land must never become a grey and unpleasant concrete swathe. It is right that the bulldozer must be pensioned off in the inner city to end the havoc that it has wreaked. It is equally right that the concrete mixer should be allowed to set hard in the countryside to ensure its protection.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): I am sure that the House is listening with great interest to the hon. Gentleman's remarks. It seems that there is a fundamental inconsistency and, indeed, conflict underlying them. I represent an inner-city constituency and I know, contrary to what the hon. Gentleman says, that the urban aid programme is essential in modernising neighbourhoods and areas to prevent further decay. Public money is needed for that purpose. That is the only way in which we can stop the urban spread into green belt areas. I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument about that and I have sympathy with it. However, he cannot say that we should not develop and should not have bulldozers in inner cities, but that no building should take place in the green belt. There is a great inconsistency in his argument.

Mr. Murphy: I do not see an inconsistency, because I believe that this Government have turned their mind to this problem. They have recognised the need for organisations such as the Urban Development Corporation. We must recognise that if the burden of taxation is taken from private enterprise, private enterprise is thereby encouraged to develop those inner city areas which public money failed to deal with previously.

Conservation and development are vital to developers and housing associations which wish to use waste land in inner cities, to farmers and landowners who wish to combine productive efficiency with landscape beauty, to conservationists who cherish listed buildings, archaeological sites, water resources and wild life habitats, and to ordinary men and women who, together with their families, want to own their own plot of home land and to care for it responsibly—indeed, to everyone who wishes to safeguard the essential nature of Britain.

As one who represents two new towns, I believe that the people who live there are also especially conscious of the value of the green belt. It is for these reasons that I believe that the Gracious Speech might more loudly have echoed such views; but I look to the references on the better protection of the environment for the necessary action.

5.11 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): As I represent a constituency in which more than 8,000 people

are out of work, I listened with considerable sadness to a number of the speeches made this afternoon. Little is said in the Gracious Speech about the needs of areas such as mine to attract new industry if any of those out of work are to have any hope for the future.

The Gracious Speech referred to a Bill, which no doubt will occupy much of the time of the House, for the abolition of the GLC and metropolitan counties. My constituency is in a metropolitan county. I sought to intervene during the Prime Minister's speech to ask a simple question: does the Government's logic extend equally to the shire counties and to the metropolitan areas? If Merseyside county council—the county was formerly part of Lancashire—is to be abolished, why not split Lancashire, Surrey, Sussex, or any of the other shire counties that are riddled with non-existent social services under the administration of Tory authorities?

One may be honest and say that Layfield was right a long time ago and that we should go for single unitary authorities across the whole of the land. If I remember correctly, it was the Conservative party, not the Labour party, which introduced the 1972 legislation, which operated from 1974, to create the metropolitan counties. Back in the days of Layfield, it was never convenient to go for single unitary authorities, because it was thought that Socialists might thereby control areas of the shire counties. Much of the argument that was heard this afternoon about who runs services applies equally to the county councils.

I am an honest man, and I wait with amused interest to see how the Government will logically justify the Bill to abolish the metropolitan counties without touching the shire counties. It may be that, because I have served on a metropolitan district council, I understand what the matter is all about. The Government should say, "We do not like the GLC because we do not like who runs it. We do not like the metropolitan counties because we do not like who runs them. They are run by Socialists with Socialist principles." At least it would be honest if the Government said that. History will note what happens to local government. If one starts down the road of having different systems because councils might be controlled by a different party, one is setting a dangerous precedent.

Listening to the Gracious Speech and the Prime Minister's comments on it—perhaps they set a marker on the road for the future—I thought that none of those arguments and none of that time will do much to help the 8,000 unemployed in my constituency. They will do nothing to attract industry to St. Helens. They will do nothing to help the glass industry which is St. Helens' primary industry. They will certainly do nothing to help the other major industry—coal mining. None of that time and none of those arguments—the arguments will be interesting—will do a single thing to give a job to one of my 8,000 constituents who are out of work or to help the basic industries of St. Helens. That is where the Gracious Speech is so lamentably lacking.

The Government talk about caring. They keep telling us that they care about this problem, but they do nothing. The Government compare themselves with the Americans and say that the Americans have a low wage economy. They do not say that the Americans invest in their economy. During the past five years, billions of pounds have flown from our economy to deprived countries such as the Cayman Islands, Barbados and other tax havens. A total of £35 billion has fled and not been invested in our economy.

It is all very well for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to talk about us being overpaid. Industry is under-invested. If we get investment, the skill and manpower in the north of England will provide the products that will beat the world. Investment is needed, but the Gracious Speech is silent on investment. The Gracious Speech is silent on all the things that really matter—jobs, the need to refurbish housing stock and the parts of this land where the infrastructure needs to be replaced. It has become a standard joke among those who are interested in roads and sewers that a double-decker bus each week falls into our sewerage system, simply because the sewerage system is collapsing and needs refurbishing. What do the Government propose? What does the Gracious Speech say about that? Nothing. The Gracious Speech pretends that it seeks to solve the problems of our land. It does not even begin to touch them. It does not touch the lives of the more than 3 million, going on 4 million, officially registered unemployed or the real unemployed who number nearer 5 million. The Gracious Speech does nothing to give them any hope, and that is its tragedy.

In case the House thinks that I always look upon the woeful side, I should point out that there were a couple of points in the Gracious Speech that were pleasing to the eye. I greatly welcome the item on the international aspects of child abduction and the custody of children. That matter is close to the heart of one of my constituents. Her daughter, Leila, who is aged about 13, is thought to be in Saudi Arabia. My constituent's former husband left Turkey when the child went out to visit him. There are no international laws by which her mother can seek to reclaim that child. My constituent is not rich enough to afford a lawyer in Saudi Arabia. Leila, who has lived most of her life in St. Helens, has spent the last 15 months in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi authorities tell us that the embassy has done all that it can. Only today I received a further letter from the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs telling me that the child seems to have disappeared from Jeddah and may be in South Yemen.

We need laws that will enable us to enforce our custody orders in other countries. We need an international arrangement and agreement, so that children brought up in one country cannot be hijacked by a parent and taken to another part of the world into perhaps alien cultures. One is not being disrespectful towards those cultures, but one cannot take a child from one cultural background into another overnight and expect the child's best interests to be served, because in all custody matters surely the child's interests should be paramount. I therefore welcome that aspect of the Gracious Speech. I hope that the legislation will come speedily before the House and that it will command all-party support.

There are two further small points in the Gracious Speech that I welcome. The first is the independent prosecution system. I hope that it will command the overall support of the House. I notice, however, that the Government have tagged on to that point a short sentence which says that the Attorney-General will be able

"to refer Crown Court sentences for the opinion of the Court of Appeal."

I had thought that the independent prosecution system might receive all-party support. It should not have tagged

[Mr. Gerald Bermingham]

on to it a provision that is rather like doing away with juries because the cases are too complicated. It is something that flies in the face of our historical system. We have always had appalling sentencing and judges who pass sentences that are too severe or far too lenient. That has been a fact of life and a fact of the system. There are other ways of changing it, but if we give the prosecution the right of appeal, we shall open the sentencing system and begin to go down the road which we so often find in other countries where even acquittals are appealed to another court in the hope that there might finally be a conviction. Indeed, when there is a conviction, one can appeal up the chain in the hope of obtaining the type of tough-nut sentence which will prove satisfactory to the state. One should always remember that in the criminal courts it is the state that has all the resources. The defence rarely, if ever, has resources equal to those of the state. One therefore loads the balance once again towards the state.

I warn the Government that I and, I am sure, many other lawyers in the House will view with grave suspicion any attempt to create an appellate system against judicial sentence. I note that the Minister is shaking his head. That perhaps shows that that is not what the Government will do. If that proves to be the case, I shall be very relieved, as will many other lawyers, but the way that the matter is framed in the Gracious Speech gives rise to that suspicion.

My last point is about the insolvency Bill. Many practitioners welcome the insolvency Bill because current insolvency laws have been—if I may put it gently—abused. In our insolvency laws no account has been taken of the social audit, the rights of people who work in companies which have been subject to receivership or liquidation orders or the needs of the area where the liquidation occurs. We have had a classic example of that recently with the Acrow liquidation. Many of us are worried about foreign companies rather than management being allowed to buy. The managers and people who know the industry are the best people to refurbish and recreate the industry where there has been financial collapse.

I hope that that Bill will come soon to the Floor of the House, because it is known that there has been a great deal of malpractice in the liquidation world. There have been receiverships where assets have been sold at knockdown prices and where banks have moved in and ensured that they had their money back and the receiver's costs while other creditors were left, like Nero, fiddling while Rome burnt. They do not have a chance. There have been cases where the receivership always seems to turn up in the same hands—it is almost as if there were a "ring" involved—and people who were directors of a company one day became directors of another company the next day because the first had gone bankrupt. Suddenly the same job is being done by another company, and, funnily enough, the second company buys from the receiver of the first company the machinery of the old factory at scrap value, and the machinery then carries on producing in the new factory. The creditors are once again the sufferers of what clearly was a knockdown sale.

Rumour has it that the insolvency legislation is weak in its drafting. None of us has seen the terms, but the professions are riddled with the leaks. The Government do not have a good record for keeping their secrets. Therefore, one fears that the rumours that one has been hearing are true.

I serve notice on the Government that many of us who are professionals will take apart a weak insolvency Bill, if only for one reason. Unless the recommendations of the Cork committee, some of which were weak and did not go to the heart of the matter, are implemented, the Bill will not be worth the paper that it is written on. Therefore, it will be the duty of every Member of the House who understands the subject to rewrite it. We must stop the practices that have been occurring in insolvency law. We must seek to protect creditors and jobs when companies crash for reasons which are often external to that section of the business.

We must ensure that there is an element of social responsibility in liquidations. Everyone has fought shy of that in this country in the past, but it is not fought shy of in parts of the continent or the Americas. There is no reason why a liquidation should mean the break-up and destruction of the life of everyone involved. The object should be to rescue rather than to dispense.

As I said, there are one or two small parts of the Gracious Speech which are worth looking at. I regret, however, that the Gracious Speech is like the curate's egg—as he so rightly put it, "bad in parts", which of course meant that it was all bad.

Regrettably, the Government seem once again to have their priorities wrong. We should look to the priorities of people rather than those of the City and the institutions.

5.27 pm

Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): I welcome the Gracious Speech for its realism. Today is also polling day in the United States, and the Gracious Speech and its references to our economy must be seen against the background of the world in which we may be living during the next Session of Parliament when, I hope, the American Administration will start to adopt the policy outlined on page 3 of the Gracious Speech, where it says that the

"Government will continue to pursue policies founded on sound money".

That policy has not been conspicuous in the American Administration over the past few years.

I am worried that after the presidential election, when the Administration begin to tackle their budget deficit—which they should instead of living in the cloud cuckoo world in which sadly so much of their economy is now founded—we may find that the repercussions will spread across the Atlantic to us and to Europe. Therefore, it is essential that we have a Gracious Speech which is not a catalogue of give-away benefits, but which faces the fact that we may have a difficult economic climate in which to operate towards the end of next year.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does my hon. Friend accept that his criticism of the Reagan Administration is somewhat unjust, bearing in mind that the growth in that country is approximately three times that of the United Kingdom and that its record of creating jobs has been outstanding? Is it not true in business that one needs to borrow to expand and that as long as one can see oneself paying for the borrowing, borrowing is not harmful?

Mr. NcNair-Wilson: No, it is not—provided that one can see oneself paying for the borrowing. As we know to our cost, however, having witnessed the financial management of Britain by the Labour party, it has taken the present Administration all their time to pay back those

debts. That being so, I am not convinced that my hon. Friend's attractive policy of borrowing one's way out of trouble is likely to solve the problems underlying our economy.

I was also glad to find in the Gracious Speech the commitment to work for a more flexible and competitive economy. However much one may be committed to the success of a substantial manufacturing base in Britain, one must recognise that we now produce less liquid steel than Mexico and that many of the great industries on which our history was founded are now in decline or very much smaller than they were when I first came to the House 20 years ago.

We must recognise that change is inevitable, go along with that change and make the best that we possibly can of it. Therefore, I believe that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was absolutely correct to point out that the problems facing the British economy today are not due to lack of demand. The demand is there, but we are unable to satisfy it with the right products at the right prices for customers in this country. In those circumstances, it is important not to shy away, looking for easy ways of borrowing one's way out of problems and manufacturing jobs that are not really necessary if we are to make ourselves competitive.

It is also important, however, that we should carry the people of this country with us. I am not convinced that the policies which have produced the record low rate of inflation and the present realism in industry have permeated right through to the grass roots. There are two ways of looking at every problem. The optimist looks at his glass and says that it is half full, while the pessimist says that it is half empty. We must define more accurately the prize to be attracted by the price to be paid. I hope that the Government will take account of that aspect. If people are asked to make sacrifices it is essential that they know the end to which those sacrifices are required. The alternative is to create the grievances which unite the moderate and the militant, a good example of that being the current mining dispute.

If we are to make ourselves more flexible and competitive, we must recognise that we have within our grasp resources which we can use efficiently and over which we have total control. I wish to deal with just one of those resources—energy. This country is uniquely fortunate in having the four-fuel economy in abundance. If some of our competitors who seem to do so well in British markets had those advantages they would probably be cleaning up the market throughout the world. The Government must pay far greater attention to that aspect than in the past.

I wish to concentrate on one form of energy—electricity. I declare an interest, in that for many years I have had a business association with a company in Sheffield which uses a great deal of electricity. That company uses between £4 million and £5 million worth of electricity annually and is thus extremely interested in the price level. An almost identical plant producing an identical product with similar machines on the other side of the Channel has an electricity cost advantage of nearly 30 per cent. Clearly, there must be a great temptation to invest further money in areas where such advantages exist.

I appreciate that one of the problems in giving substantial help to substantial users is that the original statute insists that the CEGB and the Electricity Council have an even-handed policy towards all consumers, which means that any concessions must be on a basis other than that of continuous supply. For a process operation, however, an interruptible basis is both dangerous and damaging. I hope, therefore, that Ministers concerned with these matters will try to ensure that really large users such as the steel industry are given a completely different deal from that of other electricity users. If the steel industry, for example, can show that it is able to compete more effectively with continental and other producers there will be a ripple effect. There will be a domino effect throughout industry, leading to all kinds of additional benefits.

In considering electricity, we must also consider how it is generated. Everyone thought that 80 per cent. of electricity was generated at coal-fired power stations, but that has changed somewhat as a result of the current dispute. It has, however, become crystal clear that burning coal is cheaper than burning oil. I am absolutely convinced, therefore, that despite its present difficulties the coal-mining industry can enjoy a very bright future. The Government have poured massive investment into that industry. Sadly, however, despite that investment and despite the deal offered to the National Union of Mineworkers, we have been unable to persuade the bulk of those in the industry that we are on their side. I blame that on the failure of the National Coal Board to get the message across and on certain members of the NUM who have deliberately tried to lead their members up the garden path and, by a mixture of grievance and great violence, have managed to persuade them to threaten not just their own jobs but the jobs of many other people in industry.

Closures are nothing new to the coal industry. They go on all the time. I have always found it hard to understand the logic of persuading miners to go on extracting a product from geologically faulted seams, perhaps crawling about in 3 in of water to produce a product which is totally uncommercial when they have brought it to the surface. The answer must surely be to close, where we can, pits which are in that condition so that we can move to the stand-up mining that is now beginning to develop.

The Labour party perhaps knows more about pit closures than any other party in Britain. The Labour Government's Coal Industry Act of 1965 set as the criterion for closure any pit that could not cover its running expenses.

Mr. Lofthouse: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that when the Labour Government, through the National Coal Board, were responsible for pit closures there were other jobs available to offer the men being made redundant?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: The hon. Gentleman and I have debated these matters for more than 20 years, and I entirely accept his point I was about to come to that aspect. The NCB's enterprise company, which has been set up rather in the same way as the British Steel Corporation's industry operation to find jobs for those displaced by closures, needs to be boosted substantially so that we can do in the pit closure areas what we have done in the steel plant closure areas.

I can say with a degree of certainty that Sir Charles Villiers, who now heads the British Steel Corporation industry group, has had great successes in towns such as Consett which revolved around the steel industry. I entirely support what has been said. I hope that the

[Mr. McNair-Wilson]

Government will recognise that if we are to modernise the coal industry we must provide, and be seen to provide, alternative employment for those who will be displaced.

Some years ago I worked in the Swansea valley. When mining stopped in the villages of Ystradgynlais and Ystalyfera, high-tech companies, such as Smiths' and smaller electronic businesses were introduced. As a result, it was possible to mitigate the problems caused by pit closures. If we are to carry the miners with us, by which I mean the country, because they are an integral part of our energy equation and our economy, we must make it clear that we are offering them both the Coal Board's package —a secure job for those who want it—and alternative investement in the areas where there are pit closures so that alternative jobs will exist.

We must recognise that there can be no winners at the end of the coal dispute. However long it goes on, and whatever happens, the two protagonists must recognise that the country, the industry and its consumers will all lose. The two totem poles which exist in the form of the March announcement and "Plan for Coal" are obstacles to finding a solution.

"Plan for Coal" was drawn up by Eric Varley immediately after the Arab oil price increase in 1973-74. It reflected the problems of the miners' strike and the serious earthquake in world economies caused by that oil upheaval. It refers to production targets of 200 million tonnes, but that is not the way forward for the industry. It has a bright future, but the "Plan for Coal", like Lord Robens, pins its faith on production figures. The coal industry as a future provided it supplies fuel at the right price. If it does that, industry will convert to it, power stations will continue to use it and the whole country will benefit from it.

The Gracious Speech is realistic and does not offer easy answers. If we read it with care and note that in such comments as

"a more flexible and competitive economy"

we are laying a blueprint for the future, we see that, whatever happens in the American election and economy, we can have a strong and prosperous economy.

5.43 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): The Gracious Speech is a disappointment because it does not attempt to tackle the central issue of unemployment. The Prime Minister quoted

"my Government remains deeply concerned about unemployment and will continue policies designed to achieve better opportunities"

from the Gracious Speech. For the unemployed those fine words do not butter many parsnips.

Only two weeks ago the Chancellor admitted that he could do little about unemployment. We live in an era with vast governmental bureaucratic paraphernalia, which is allied to modern computer technology. Although the Government have those resources at their command, we cannot even give the Chancellor marks for trying. He seems to have given up the fight.

By contrast, I recall the 1979 election, when the Government first came to power, and the famous Saatchi and Saatchi advertisement, "Labour isn't working". The Tory party manifesto promised that a Conservative Government's first job would be to rebuild the economy and to reunite a divided and disillusioned people. But five and half years later, there are more than 2 million more people on the dole. The strife and social divisions in society are almost at breaking point.

Some leading church figures publicly recognised that fact. In return they received a torrent of vulgar abuse from some Tory Members. That shows how low the Tory party has sunk. It seems that crude Poujadiste elements have taken over. Their approach is different from the "one nation" approach of Butler, Macmillan and the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Health).

Investment is flowing swiftly out of the country—£47 billion since May 1979. That money should have been used to modernise and re-equip British industry. Many influential forecasters, including the Cambridge group, predict that unemployment will reach 4 million by 1990. That figure does not include the hidden unemployment, which the Government's modern version of statistics hides. The Chancellor seems to have given up. He said that he could do little about it. What an admission to make! His excuse is that wages are too high, yet we have the lowest labour costs of all major industrial countries except Spain. He is saying that the rich do not work because they are not rich enough, and the poor because they are not poor enough. Yet he is the man in charge of our economic destiny.

Cuts in wages can only mean cuts in demand in shops and factories, which in turn will put more people out of work. The economic thesis on which the Government's policies are based is absurd. No wonder a former Minister, the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) pointed out that the only achievement of Tory policies is to have produced real unemployment, not real jobs. What an indictment, especially from that source!

A week ago construction workers lobbied Parliament. The first thing that they pointed out was that 450,000 construction workers were unemployed at a time when there is a pressing need for better roads, schools, hospitals and housing. A few months ago the south Wales chief officers' group pointed out that, by the year 2,000, much of Welsh housing would be fit only for slum clearance. According to recent estimates, between 1979 and 1985 the proportion of housing expenditure as part of total public expenditure will have fallen by two thirds. The amount of money for new housing projects in Wales has been halved in a similar period.

Local authorities are no longer able to sustain even the modest housing programme of a few years ago. Waiting lists are escalating. As well as problems for young people and newly marrieds, the fact that we have an aging population means that much more specialist accommodation is now needed. All this is happening at a time when we are keeping construction workers on the dole.

The number of older houses in Wales is far higher than in other regions of the United Kingdom. The demand for home improvement grants has reached an unprecedented level, yet when I recently wrote to my local housing manager about a case, he told me:

"Our policy this year reflects the fact that the council has received over 7,000 grant applications since early 1982 and only has sufficient resources from the Welsh Office to approve about 1,000 of them each year".

What is happening in Newport is also happening in many other parts of the country.

In south Wales terms, a housing drive makes sense. I believe that that is also the case throughout the country. We should be increasing the housing stock, and modernising older properties.

Very few balance of payments problems are involved, as housing materials are largely home produced. However, in the Chancellor's last Budget, VAT on home improvements made matters much worse. In the last few days, there has been speculation in the media that the Chancellor intends to cut housing expenditure severely yet again. Apparently a tremendous battle is now going on in the Cabinet over this issue.

Other construction projects are crying out for attention, such as the electrification of the railway network in Wales on the Paddington to Swansea and Holyhead to Crewe routes. This again means work for the construction industry and would take people off the dole queue.

I have played a small part in drawing public attention to the need for a second crossing over the Severn. The success of the existig bridge, and the urgent repairs now required to it, have proved the need for a second crossing. Projects of this kind are good for infrastructure and make us better able to compete in world markets. Equally—this is central to my argument—they would put people back to work.

In his speech to the annual CBI conference on Monday the director general, Sir Terence Beckett, referred to the importance of manufacturing industry and pointed out that, had North sea oil resources been invested in our industry, Britain could have tanned the world. I wholeheartedly agree.

Instead, those revenues have largely been used to pay dole and other social security benefits. This squandering of such a precious resource is a scandal. The policies of the Prime minister and the Chancellor offer no light at the end of the tunnel, yet the British people are waiting for a lead. We have seen what they are capable of with the scandal of starvation in Ethiopa. I was inundated with letters and telephone calls about the issue, concern was uppermost and action was swift. I am sure that hon. Members throughout the country have had similar experiences.

In my own area, Gwent county council immediately wrote to the Prime Minister and donated £10,000. The mayor of Newport launched a public appeal to raise a further £10,000 for medical supplies. That sort of feeling exists throughout the country, if only it can be harnessed.

One day the British people will come to realise that, with appropriate policies, unemployment can be solved, but not by this Government's Friedmanite economics. Consequently, when the people realise the facts of the situation, I believe that this Government will be dispatched to the dustbin of history.

5.55 pm

Mr. David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I hope that the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) will not mind if I do not immediately comment on some of his points. I shall refer to unemployment in a moment, but first I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me at this early stage in this new Session of Parliament.

The Gracious Speech outlines another heavy programme of legislative measures. It is now 14½ years since I was first elected to the House, and over this period I have seen a great deal of Government legislation come before it. Ministers have spelt out the advantages of their Bills and have explained how each and every one heralded a new dawn, yet looking at all the legislation which has passed through the House since 1970 I wonder whether the country would have been much worse off had most of it never seen the light of day.

Having said that, I warmly welcome the proposed changes in electoral law, insolvency law and occupational pension rights. I am very pleased about the introduction of the independent prosecuting service, although this may cause difficulties in its introduction. Against that, I do not extend a welcome to the proposals to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties. No doubt the House will concern itself with these matters over the next few months.

However important or unimportant the Government's legislative programme may be, I believe that the issue which will dominate the coming Session of Parliament — and perhaps the remainder of this Parliament — is unemployment. It is now well over 3 million and there is no sign of it falling. Indeed, it has recently risen and will probably continue to edge up. Whatever the arguments may be about how to deal with unemployment, it is now at a level that is socially intolerable and unacceptable.

As there is always a time lag between taking measures to deal with unemployment and these measures becoming effective, I believe that action is required now. In this context I welcome the restoration to respectability of the 1944 White Paper on employment, which contained the acceptance by the wartime Coalition Government that one of their primary aims and responsibilities should be the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment. This was subsequently accepted by all post-war Governments between 1945 and 1974 — Labour and Conservative alike—although I regret to say that it has not been accepted by the last Labour Government nor the present Conservative Government.

The foreword to the 1944 White Paper stated:

> "A country will not suffer from mass unemployment so long as the total demand for its goods and services is maintained at a high level".

It was precisely because the demand for goods and services was maintained at a high level between 1945 and 1974 that we had full employment during those years. It is precisely because the demand for goods and services has not been maintained at a high level since 1974 that we have had such high unemployment since then.

The argument that there is no shortage of demand because of the large quantity of goods imported or because of inadequate exports holds no water. Although the position is a little worse now, over the past five years enormous surpluses have been shown in our balance of payments. Any further increase in these surpluses, brought about either by lower imports or higher exports, would have led to action by other countries to right their balance of payments problems and reduce our surplus. The fact of the matter is that there has been no extra demand for Britain in recent years in foreign markets or from import saving.

Today, the British economy is operating at about 25 per cent. below capacity. More than 3 million men and women are out of work. A large number of people are engaged in schemes to alleviate unemployment which, if we are honest, we know are not really very productive or economically beneficial forms of activity. In addition, millions at work are under-employed, despite all the claims about higher productivity, and enormous capital assets are either not utilised or are under-utilised.

[Mr. David Knox]

In such circumstances there is room for a substantial increase in output, and this will happen only if the Government return to the demand management policies which their predecessors pursued with such success between 1945 and 1974. There is no chance of returning to full employment unless the Government act to raise the level of demand steadily, though substantially, over the next few years.

If there was a war such as the first and second world wars, the Government would increase demand considerably because we would need the extra output to survive. Surely the case for increasing demand is equally strong today, when we need better infrastructure, better social and public services and higher living standards. Unless the Government act to increase demand, all that will happen will be that we shall jog along with unemployment falling a little for a while, and rising a little for a while, but always being at far too high a level. I do not believe that the British people will stand for this indefinitely.

At the last general election the electorate gave the Government the benefit of the doubt on this issue, as people did not believe that either of the other parties would do any better. However, at the next general election, if unemployment has not fallen and is not continuing to fall, the British people will conclude that the Government have had their chance and that the time has come to give one of the other parties a chance, even though they may not be convinced that the other parties can do any better.

Therefore, I hope that there will be a change in direction in economic policy during the next few months. We need both increased Government expenditure, particularly capital expenditure, and reduced taxation, to encourage increased private consumption. I do not believe that it would be sensible to reflate massively and immediately, but we should be aiming at a growth rate of 5 to 6 per cent. a year, generated by expansionist Government policies. Anything less would be inadequate.

There is a danger that if increased expenditure is pumped into the economy, all of it, or even a significant proportion of it, will go merely into wage and salary increases and provoke a further cost-inflationary spiral. While this is a possibility, the introduction of an incomes policy aimed at keeping wages and salary increases under control would make such a possibility much less likely. Of course, like all policies, incomes policies have weaknesses. They introduce a rigidity into the labour market that places a great strain on it. They can make the maintenance of differentials difficult. There is inherent in any incomes policy the possibility of confrontation between the Government and powerful trade unions, with all that that can mean, though, as the miners' strike has shown, that can happen without an incomes policy. There is also the danger of massive wage or salary increases when the policy comes to an end. However, that has always seemed to me to be an argument for maintaining the policy more or less indefinitely.

I concede that there are these and other weaknesses in any incomes policy, but I ask those who are strongly opposed to an incomes policy to accept, as readily as I accept the disadvantages of an incomes policy, the disadvantages of rejecting such a policy, the most substantial of which on the present evidence is that, to avoid rocketing income-cost inflation, the economy has to be substantially deflated below capacity, with consequent mass unemployment. If, as I believe, the evidence shows that the price of a return to a high level of employment is the introduction of an incomes policy, this seems a small price to pay. If, on the other hand, the price of not having an incomes policy is over 3 million out of work, that seems to me to be an unacceptably high price.

The present is a particularly appropriate and convenient time to introduce an incomes policy. In the past, incomes policies have usually been introduced at times of high economic activity and high income settlements, which have made their success more difficult. Now we have low economic activity and relatively low income settlements, so market pressures are not likely to work against any incomes policy that might be introduced.

On another matter, over the past few years there has beeen widespread discussion in this country and in western Europe about food surpluses in the European Community and about how to reduce these food surpluses by cutting output. I have never understood this argument. In a world where millions go to bed hungry every night, and where hundreds of thousands die as a result of famines, it has always seemed absurd to me to discuss cutting food output. This point has been reinforced in recent weeks by the situation in Ethiopia and I hope that public discussion about food surpluses in the Community will take a different course in the future as a result of that.

Far from cutting food production in the Community, we should be directing this surplus food-producing capacity in the Community to meet the needs of the millions starving throughout the world.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I am following my hon. Friend's argument closely and find myself in some agreement with him, but if he is proposing that we should increase food production, why did he vote in favour of milk quotas and not join the brave few who voted against them?

Mr. Knox: I did so because the National Farmers Union, which represents the farmers, asked us to do so, as my hon. Friend should remember. I was not—

Mr. Winterton: The farmers did not.

Mr. Knox: My hon. Friend is perfectly entitled to speak for the farmers of Macclesfield, but I shall speak for the farmers of Staffordshire moorlands. I had a large number of letters thanking me for voting for milk quotas.

When my hon. Friend intervened I was talking about directing the surplus food producing capacity of Europe to meet the needs of the millions starving throughout the world. I shall be told that, in the long term, this provides no solution to the problem and that what is needed is the export of agricultural know-how and capital, so that the peoples of the Third world can eventually produce their own requirements. However, as Keynes said:

"In the long run . . . we are all dead."

At least in the short and middle term the mobilisation of Europe's surplus food-producing capacity could save millions of lives. I believe that such a policy would be morally, economically and politically right. It could take its place as one of the great acts of history, such as the Marshall plan. Is not this an area where Britain should be giving a lead within the European Community?

6.10 pm

Mr. Stan Thorne (Preston): I welcome some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox). They show that there are at least some

Government supporters who address their minds to the economic causes of unemployment and who are prepared to suggest ways in which we might remedy the situation.

I looked at the Gracious Speech for real proposals to reduce unemployment. There is none. There is nothing to assist the 18,428 unemployed in the Preston travel-to-work area, and to that figure there now have to be added the 477 who work at the royal ordnance factory at Chorley. Chorley, Leyland, Bamber Bridge and Preston make up the Preston travel-to-work area.

What does the Queen's Speech say about unemployment? It is far more realistic than the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Prime Minister. It says:

"While noting that the numbers of people in work are steadily rising, my Government remains deeply concerned about unemployment and will continue policies designed to achieve better opportunities for employment and to help the unemployed obtain the training or work experience needed to fill them."

What hollow words those prove to be when one looks at what is done by the Government. There is nothing to assist the 16·1 per cent. in the north-west region who are unemployed.

As for prices, there is nothing in the Queen's Speech that will help those living on low fixed incomes. Prices are a class question. Anyone who happens to be wealthy feels that prices are of little or no consequence. That may explain why there is no reference to prices in the Queen's Speech—or is it because there are major increases to come during next year?

Social security benefits interest only those who have to claim them. This Government represent a different class of people, so there is no uplift for those drawing supplementary benefit or mobility allowance. Regrettably, the Queen's Speech fails to reverse the £1 per week reduction in heating allowance for those on supplementary benefit in certain circumstances. It fails to propose immediate relief to families with children, who form the largest group amongst the poor. Hon. Members will be aware that 3·5 million children are being brought up on the margins of poverty. The Queen's Speech signals no action against that crime. Cuts in benefits are likely, although they are not mirrored in the speech.

A recent DHSS survey showed that more than half the children in unemployed families wore second-hand shoes. I know that the position is infinitely worse in Ethiopia, but clearly the wealthy nations, including our own, have no continuous plans to close the huge gulf between the rich and the poor nations. There is nothing in the Queen's Speech about that.

The Government's priorities for expenditure appear to be the rescue of Johnson Matthey Bankers, paying fat commissions to the City for privatisation fees and protecting investors in the City—or perhaps the buses White Paper, which proposes a free-for-all, is designed to help the needy in Britain.

What is needed, and what is omitted from the Queen's Speech, is an improved transport system and not the weakened system that will undoubtedly result from the Government's proposed Bill. I am sure that I am no exception in being able to produce printed responses to the buses White Paper. One lady says:

"If my buses were taken off I would have an hour each way's walk to work. What price democracy? I also pay rates. Why should people who would appear to have chauffeur driven cars deprive a substantial portion of the country of transport?"

Another says:

"It will create further unemployment amongst bus company employees, garage mechanics etc., and no concessionary tickets for pensioners."

There is no reference in the Queen's Speech to a major extension and electrification of our rail system, but it is long overdue. We also need public investment in real terms to enable local authorities in some areas to replace public service vehicles, which are looking a bit dilapidated these days. This would have a multiplier effect in the economy, so reducing unemployment.

There is nothing in the Gracious Speech that might give some hope to our youth. There are no money allowances to encourage continuing education after the age of 16. There are no realistic awards to young people pursuing further and higher education so that it does not inflict hardship. There is no promise of worthwhile employment that could give satisfaction to young people after initial training. There is no realisation of the need to provide for the situation that we shall face in the early 1990s when, if we are to avoid having 5 million or even 6 million unemployed, we shall be turning to a three or four-day week. Plans should be drawn up already, because that will mean three or four days' leisure. What preparations are the Government making? It is their direct responsibility, but there is nothing in the Queen's Speech about it.

There is nothing to suggest a halt to the Government's intransigence about the miners. The dispute has cost between £1,800 million and £2,000 million. It makes no economic sense, and in my view it is not intended to. The Government's attitude to the strike is more about economic exploitation than about economic loss. The Government wish to attack the worker's right to defend his economic interests and finally to render him impotent.

There is nothing in the Gracious Speech to suggest that sanity is now prevailing at the Department of the Environment. Instead, rate-capping is to continue, as is the drive to take over central control of local government expenditure whether it be from rate income or block grant. The drift towards greater centralisation has all the signs of totalitarianism. That, too, is not in any way alluded to in the Queen's Speech.

So what have we got? Is there to be more council house building? On the contrary. I suggest, as some newspapers are already doing, that we could face cuts in local authorities' housing programmes. What a tremendous travesty of justice that would be to many youngsters in the Preston area who still, in this day and age, live with children in multi-storey blocks of flats.

There is nothing in the Queen's Speech to suggest that the tax system will favour the lower income groups, although a word or two suggests further reforms. The wealthy remain the only section under a Conservative Government who benefit from the income tax policies that have been pursued. What does the phrase

"reform of the tax system"

in the Queen's Speech mean? In whose favour will it be made? We do not know. We can only go on the basis of experience—it is the poor who pay more.

The abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils has been dealt with by previous speakers. The decision to go ahead with those measures is purely and simply anti-democratic. Earlier speakers, the Prime Minister for one, referred to "our democracy". It is as well to remind ourselves sometimes of the words of Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

"Britain has a democracy every five years."

[Mr. Stan Thorne]

Thereafter the attempts of the people to impress their will upon Governments are virtually non-existent.

Yes, build up privatisation: we shall have Second Reading debates and I hope to participate in them and to finish up on some of the Committees. Such measures are designed not to meet people's needs but to line the pockets of investors. Britain continues to have a concentration of capital in fewer and fewer hands. It is the Opposition's job to do what we can to prevent that.

6.22 pm

Mr. Tom Arnold (Hazel Grove): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for calling me so early in this Session. I want to address myself to some of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Thorne), with particular reference to the item in the Queen's Speech on local government. I apologise in advance if one or two of the things that I am going to say will have the smack of a late-night Adjournment debate, but I must perforce make some reference to circumstances in my constituency. It is those circumstances which lead me to believe that the Government are right to come forward with the commitment, which I welcome, that

"A Bill will be introduced to abolish the Greater London Council and the metropolitan county councils."

I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Cabinet have decided to proceed with that legislation in this Session because it is necessary and urgent.

During the past 10 years, the Greater Manchester council's record has been an unhappy one—indeed, an abysmal one. The Greater Manchester council has frequently acted in an unthinking, uncaring and bureaucratic manner. Therefore, it is no wonder that my hon. Friends from Greater Manchester are unanimous in thinking that it is high time that an unnecessary and expensive tier of local government was removed. In the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in her speech earlier:

"We want local government to be closer to the people."

It was somewhat ironic that, when my right hon. Friend made those remarks, Liberal Members roared with laughter. That was in sorry contrast to what Liberal politicians say locally about community politics and the need for democracy and accountability. But until recently the Stockport council was Conservative-controlled. When it was Conservative-controlled it passed a resolution saying that it was high time that the Greater Manchester council was abolished. Unfortunately, following the local government elections last spring, no one party in Stockport has overall control and the council has now passed a resolution that it opposes the Government.

Furthermore, the council has invited my hon. Friends the Members for Stockport (Mr. Flavell) and for Cheadle (Mr. Normanton) and myself to attend a meeting to debate the abolition issue with local councillors. I am sorry to have to tell the council that for me, and indeed for my hon. Friends—no doubt they will make their point of view known on another occasion—it is frankly too late. We are committed to the policy because our record as constituency Members of Parliament during several Parliaments now has served to show us that the Greater Manchester council simply has no place in our local affairs.

I want to cite briefly a matter that is causing vexation and difficulty in my constituency at the moment. A few weeks ago, the Greater Manchester council decided, without any consultation so far as I am able to ascertain, certainly not with the local district councillors and certainly not with the Stockport council, to put down some double yellow lines on the main Stockport road through the town of Romiley. It so happens that doing that will affect the livelihood of a large number of traders. Naturally, they are up in arms about a proposal about which they have not been consulted. I cite that example because it is all too typical of the way in which the Greater Manchester council has behaved over many years. Time and again we have found that overlapping jurisdiction, interference and bureaucracy have served to divorce the Greater Manchester council from the people whom it is meant to serve.

There have been occasions when the Greater Manchester council and the Stockport council found themselves at loggerheads over planning issues, to the point where it was extremely difficult to resolve such disputes without bringing in the Minister and his officials in London.

Therefore, I and my hon. Friends who take the view that the Government are right to go ahead with the legislation, do so not for any theoretical or ideological reasons, but simply because our experience as constituency Members of Parliament seeking to work in the area for the best interests of our constituents has led us to the view that the Greater Manchester council simply is not up to its task. It is for that reason that I want to make it clear today, on the first day of the debate on the Queen's Speech, how much I welcome the Government's commitment to go ahead with the legislation. When the time comes, the people of Stockport will see that it is in their best interests to support the legislation too.

6.27 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The real reason why the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils are being abolished is simply political spite. It is not because they are incompetent or anything else. I doubt whether the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Arnold) would dispute that if the GLC had been under Conservative control, if there had been no Labour majority and no Mr. Ken Livingstone, we would not see the proposed Bill in the Queen's Speech.

We saw today the Prime Minister at her hectoring worst. I only wish that some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) could have come from the mouth of the Prime Minister. Here is a Government who have been in office for over five years, under whom the country has seen mass unemployment, devastation and the misery which accompanies large-scale unemployment. But what did we hear from the right hon. Lady today—a denial of any responsibility. She blamed everyone but herself, saying that public expenditure was somehow all wrong. The only possible solution that she had was a simple one. It was the same one that we have heard from the Chancellor or read about when he has made speeches abroad—wage cuts. That is the new Tory line. If we do not have wage cuts, so the argument runs, we cannot reduce unemployment. Conservative Members know well that that is nonsense.

The Queen's Speech says that the

"Government remains deeply concerned about unemployment".

That will not be much consolation to all the young people who cannot get a job and who, in some parts of the country, remain on the dole queue for years on end. What consolation will it be, either, for men in their 40s and 50s who, on the basis of present policies, may well conclude that they will never work again?

The Government pursue policies that increase unemployment. Does any Conservative Member believe that unemployment will be substantially lower by the time we debate next year's Queen's Speech? Is not it more likely that unemployment will be worse? Few Conservative Members can have any optimism that, by the end of this Parliament, whether it runs for four or five years, unemployment will be any better.

The west midlands has been much affected. It is well to remember than when the Government came to power, unemployment in that region was 5·1 per cent. Now it is 15·5 per cent. and far too many people remain unemployed for a long time. Figures from the Library show that in my constituency nearly half the unemployed have been out of work for more than a year.

The hon. Member for Moorlands was right to say that the real reason for unemployment is the lack of effective demand in the economy. That is why we face such a crisis.

We are frequently told by Ministers and Conservative Members that Labour Members have no monopoly of compassion about the misery of unemployment. We make no such claim, but we do say that it is not enough merely to include a few words in the Queen's Speech about concern over unemployment. The Government's concern is no use unless they take action to reduce unemployment. Concern alone is useless to the victims of the Government's policies.

It should not be forgotten that many of those who have been made unemployed have also been hurt once they are on the dole. At the beginning of 1982, the Government abolished the earnings-related benefit which had helped many unemployed people in their first six months out of work. A savings ceiling—originally £2,000 and now £3,000—was introduced for supplementary benefit. That is no incentive to people to save while they are at work, and the ceiling also includes redundancy payments. People in their mid-40s and early 50s who have saved £3,000 or £4,000—not much to Conservative Members, I should have thought—will not get a penny in supplementary benefit when their unemployment benefit is exhausted after one year.

The Queen's Speech refers to a reform of the tax system. We were told at the 1979 and 1983 elections that the Conservative Government would reduce taxation, but most people pay proportionally more in income tax and national insurance than they did when Labour was in office.

However, those with substantial wealth have benefited from the Government's policies. The most wealthy pay less tax, capital transfer tax has largely been undermined and not only do the wealthiest own substantial private wealth, but they ensure that when they die, that wealth remains in the family and does not go to the Treasury.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Very good.

Mr. Winnick: Conservative Members are more interested in looking after the wealthy than they are in the overwhelming majority of people who are paying more in tax and national insurance. We know about the priorities of Conservative Members.

Inland Revenue figures show that 5 per cent. of the adult population continues to own 41 per cent. of private wealth, while about 50 per cent. of the population owns about 4 per cent. of the wealth.

Mr. Bill Walker: In my home, there are myself, my wife and my three daughters. I own virtually all the wealth. Consequently, almost all the wealth is owned by one fifth of the family. How does that affect the hon. Gentleman's statistics?

Mr. Winnick: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to declare his interest in wealth holding, I am the last person to object.

The figures that I quoted are from the Inland Revenue. The wealth concentrated in very few hands has hardly changed. Moreover, the people about whom I am talking are the very ones who have benefited from the measures taken by the Government.

I am very worried about reports that what is called the "star chamber" of Ministers is determined to slash a further £600 million from public expenditure on housing in 1985-86. Conservative Members would normally be interested in the views of the Building Employers Confederation. The president of the confederation wrote to the Prime Minister last week to say that a further reduction of £600 million on housing next year

"is equivalent to 18 per cent. of the total housing programme and could lead to around 75,000 job losses in construction and related industries."

What is the use of expressing concern in the Queen's Speech if the Government intend to take action that will result in 75,000 job losses?

Shortly before the summer recess, I asked the Prime Minister about the fall in public expenditure on housing. The right hon. Lady told me:

"Public expenditure on housing in Great Britain fell by 52 per cent. between 1979-80 and 1983-84 in cost terms".—[*Official Report*, 30 July 1984; Vol. 65, c. *11*.]

In cash terms, the reduction was from £5,460 million to £3,203 million. What do such reductions mean in human terms? We know from our surgeries and postbags that an ever-increasing number of people simply cannot get housed. If they cannot afford a mortgage, they have to join the council housing queue and many, including young couples, will have to wait years before being offered any accommodation at all.

There has been a substantial reduction in the rented sector over the past four years. I do not wish this evening to argue about the sale of council houses, but surely it must be right that houses that are sold are subsequently replaced. The Government have not done that.

If the housing programme is to be slashed next year, not only will far fewer council dwellings be built—we are already at an all-time low—but people, such as some in my constituency, who live in pre-war dwellings and have been waiting for them to be modernised will have to wait even longer.

During the recess I attended a meeting in my constituency of tenants who live on the Rosehill estate in Willenhall. They were promised that modernisation would be undertaken in the near future, but no action has been taken because the council does not have the money, as a result of Government policy. If such further reductions as

[Mr. Winnick]

I have mentioned are to take place, the tenants on that estate will probably have to wait even longer before their properties are modernised.

The truth is that a formidable housing crisis in the country is building up. There will be the sort of housing shortage that the first report of the Select Committee on the Environment predicted when we on the Committee published our findings in 1980. Therefore, hon. Members should be extremely concerned about the situation and about the pressure that is being exerted on the Secretary of State and his colleagues to carry out that reduction of £600 million in the housing programme for 1985-86.

The Queen's Speech refers to the need for better relations with the Government of Ireland. Like all my colleagues, of course, I detest the sort of terrorism that occurred in Birghton. No one would expect any Labour Member to do otherwise. Of course such terrorism is always to be deplored. Indeed, I also bear in mind other tragedies such as the Brimingham pub bombing and other acts of terrorism both on the mainland and in Northern Ireland. However, I am convinced that there is a need for a dialogue between the British and Irish Governments in order to explore the findings of the New Ireland Forum report.

That report examines the position of Anglo-Irish relations over some 60 years, and the position in Northern Ireland in depth. Hon. Members should bear in mind that the participants in the New Ireland Forum represented more than 90 per cent. of nationalists in both parts of Ireland and who totally reject violence. If I was asked what would most undermine the Provisional IRA, I would say that it would be a measure undertaken by this country and the Government of Ireland that would lead to a solution for Northern Ireland that accepted the Irish presence and recognised that many of the mistakes made 60 years ago should be rectified.

I am not advocating troops out now, or that a united Ireland can come about tomorrow or the day after that. That is probably not possible, and it is certainly not going to come about through violence. In addition, there is no possibility of consent from the majority community in Northern Ireland. However, there are other solutions and possibilities which are outlined in the report. For example, there is a possibility of a confederal-federal arrangement between Northern Ireland and the Republic. The British Government should seriously consider such options.

The Queen's Speech must be a disappointment to this country. It offers no solution. As my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Thorne) has said, the sooner this Government can be removed, the more opportunities there will be for the British people to start afresh with different policies.

6.43 pm

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): I often seem to speak after the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). However, as I disagreed with almost everything that he said, I shall not waste the time of the House in refuting his arguments. Instead, I shall address my remarks to the Gracious Speech, which I wholeheartedly welcome.

I welcome the theme of the Speech, which aims towards greater competition and more privatisation. That should reduce the burden which nationalised industries have laid on the nation and give the ordinary consumer better products and services, and more choice. However, I am sorry that in the Gracious Speech quite a number of Bills are forecast. That always seems to happen. The House will be put under strain because of the amount of legislation. Such legislation overloads the Civil Service and may sometimes reduce personal liberty. Tories, above all, should not try to regulate too much of the nation's life by legislation.

I shall give one example. The Bill about exemption from corporal punishment in schools is unwise and certainly undignified. I hope that the Bill to dismantle the councils will proceed swiftly and will not become bogged down in too much detail. The proposals were extremely popular 18 months ago, as we all knew during the last election, but they now seem to have gone rather sour and the Government must mount a giant public relations exercise to convince the public that what we are doing is both wise and sensible. Mr. Livingstone has had matters far too much his own way in the propaganda battle.

I welcome the attempts that will be made to ensure that City institutions conduct their affairs with absolute honesty. Fraud and dishonesty in any section of the City do immense damage to this country and, indeed, to the capitalist system as a whole.

We meet after the appalling outrages in Brighton and, more recently, in India. We thank God that our own Prime Minister was saved. Terrorism has become worldwide and all-embracing. Surely the Governments of the civilised world could do more to control that menace by concerted action. Law and order is unfortunately still a subject on which the Government disappoint some of their supporters. We are apparently no nearer to reintroducing the death penalty for terrorist murders or murders of policemen, although we know that a large majority of the people desire it. Violent crime continues to be horrific, with new horrors coming upon us almost daily. Some form of corporal punishment is also necessary to deter those evil people from committing detestable acts such as setting someone alight with petrol or cutting off his toes.

The coal strike continues. The question now is whether the Government can continue to hold the respect of ordinary people if violence on the picket line or intimidation of miners and their families, including incidents outside their homes, is allowed to continue. People are asking repeatedly, "Are the Government really governing? What are the Government doing? Why are the new laws not invoked to prohibit so much secondary picketing?" Today, it would seem that the Government are at last winning the contest, but it may take many weeks before the miners drift back to work in sufficiently large numbers to put an end to the strike. Therefore, action is expected now from the Government. They will lose credibility if they do not act.

People ask me, in the law-abiding part of the world in which my constituency lies, whether there is one law for the miners and one for everybody else. We all know that ordinary citizens would not be allowed to get away with what the miners are doing. The NCB has already made too many concessions and there should now be no more discussions with the NUM unless it guarantees to cease all acts of violence and intimidation.

Government supporters are disappointed that personal taxation has remained so high. Taxes can be reduced only if public expenditure is reduced. That usually means reducing the numbers employed in the Civil Service and

in all the public authorities, local and national. Some progress has been made, but much more remains to be done, particularly about the gross overstaffing in the National Health Service.

The fall in inflation is welcome. The mainstay of Government policy is sound money in which we can all have confidence.

Unemployment remains stubbornly high. In spite of the extra expense that might be involved, we should introduce some form of national service for youth, both military and civilian, to direct and engage the energies of our young people aright. I have seen the marvellous job that the armed services are doing in that respect, but for some reason it goes largely unsung. Surely we can build upon that experience. Young people want an aim and object in life. Proper leadership in some form of useful activity can provide that. Even clearing the mess of wasteland in our industrial conurbations would be better than doing nothing on the dole.

Industry is still not happy, although the slight improvement continues. Industry in the west midlands is unhappy. I understand many of its problems, but we must remember that the Government cannot do everything for industry. I regret that industry is once again failing to train enough young people for the skilled jobs of the future. It is still weak in marketing and sales and it does not always attract the best men and women in the country. It is not containing wage rises sufficiently where productivity gains are not apparent. If this goes on it will quickly bring our recovery to a halt.

The Jaguar dispute is particularly depressing in view of all that we have heard about the improvement in that company. The same applies to the Austin Rover dispute. I know many of the men personally and I know how sensible they and their wives are. I appeal to them to go back to work and not to ruin the tremendous improvement in British Leyland.

The Government must pay maximum attention to the needs of manufacturing industry, as outlined at yesterday's CBI conference. We cannot be just a nation of retailers, art dealers, restaurateurs and public relations consultants. We must have a strong manufacturing base to make the wealth on which the service industries can expand and do well. There is much greater realism in industry, among all sections of the population and certainly on the shop floor, but as a country we have to be competitive and earn our way in the world.

The Government were brilliantly successful in Hong Kong, and some sucess in achieving a better financial settlement from the EEC. They have remained firm with Russia. Indeed, in NATO we are enormously respected for our commanders and our troops. The peace movements here and abroad seem to be on the wane. If President Reagan is re-elected, as seems likely, we must try to influence him and the United States Government to continue to try to come to some understanding with the Soviets over arms control.

We have heard some dismal speeches today from the Opposition Benches, but if we were to think of Britain in relation to all the other countries in the world we should not be quite so dismal. Despite the deadlock on disarmament and arms negotiations, the exceedingly worrying unemployment figures, the sickening rise in crime and terrorism, I still think that our country at large is in better heart than it has been for a long time. We know that we are on the right road to recovery, although the road may be longer than some of us had hoped.

We are fortunate to have a Prime Minister whose strength, single-mindedness and leadership are admired not only in Britain but throughout the world. I travel a lot, and I believe that Britain is more respected abroad today than it has been for many years, possibly since the war. We are taking the lead in bringing relief to famine-stricken Ethiopia. Who is doing most of the work there? The answer is, the RAF and its aeroplanes.

In spite of all our worries and problems, how lucky we are to live in this country, with the many blessings that we have. Our constitution—so gloriously displayed today—is the envy of many nations. We have our black spots, with the coal dispute and the troubles in Northern Ireland, but in the main we live peaceably and tolerably with one another. Let us count our blessings in this troubled and turbulent world. I hope that Opposition Members will remember that when they fulminate against the Government.

6.57 pm

Mr. Michael Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I am the newest hon. Member, having faced the electorate most recently. During the election campaign many Front Bench spokesmen who were present to hear the Prime Minister's speech today came to Portsmouth to take part in the election campaign. Much of what the Prime Minister said today was said repeatedly to the electors of Portsmouth.

The Conservative party based its campaign on six points which have been reiterated, not least by the Prime Minister, on several occasions. Mr. Rock, the Conservative candidate, referred to them in at least three of his many pieces of election material. First, he said that the Tories would do more for unemployment; secondly, that there would be more care for the Health Service and that it would be in safe hands; thirdly, that there would be a better chance for education; fourthly, that the Conservatives would do more to provide better homes and that more people would be able to own their own property; fifthly, that there would be a better deal for the elderly under a Tory Government; and, sixthly, that there would be no job losses at the defence establishments in the Portsmouth area. On all six claims the Conservative Government deceived the people of Portsmouth and reneged on promises made in the 1979 and 1983 elections.

More people in my constituency are unemployed than ever before, and opportunities for the young are non-existent. The programme for the unemployed is ineffective. Of the 59 months up to the publication of the last unemployment figures, 56 months showed an increase in unemployment. During the by-election campaign the Tories said that they would do more for the unemployed. What have they done? They have created a longer list of unemployed.

The Tories said that the Health Service was safe in their hands. Ministers told the people of Portsmouth that there would be no cuts in the Health Service. Today, in Portsmouth, hospitals are under threat of closure and the Health Service is less able to cope in the community and in the hospitals.

The Tories said that there would be a better chance for education. In the last three years half a dozen schools in my constituency have been closed or are threatened with closure. Sixth form education in the city has been

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reorganised against the wishes of the majority of teachers and a substantial number of parents. Once again, education has not been handled properly.

Many hon. Members have spoken of the housing problems in their constituencies. The housing list in my constituency is higher than it has been for the past five years. Many people are living in properties which, if they were in the private sector, would be condemned as owned by Rachman-type landlords ripping off tenants. Some people in my constituency are living in housing conditions that Conservative Members would condemn out of hand if the houses were in the private sector. The Conservative-controlled council in Portsmouth has the same complacent air as is so apparent in the Chamber from Conservative Members.

The Government promised a better deal for the elderly. I have been a city councillor in Portsmouth for the past 14 years, and during the past five years I have not held a weekly advice centre without elderly people coming to explain their problems. During a debate last week, the Leader of the Opposition spoke with great emotion when he gave a graphic description of the problems faced by his constituents. There has not been a single week when elderly people have not come to my advice centre with the most depressing tales of the real problems they face. The rise in pensions does not meet even their basic essentials for existence. Yet, time and again, approaches on their behalf are turned down out of hand. The elderly are condemned to a fast declining standard of living, and every one of us should be ashamed of that.

The Government also promised to maintain defence jobs. They said that none would be lost. Within three weeks of the election in Portsmouth, South, the MOD was telling the people of Portsmouth that it had not really meant that all jobs would be saved, only those of critical importance, and that a substantial number of jobs would have to go. Privatisation in defence establishments in and around Portsmouth will mean the loss of jobs for several thousand people during the next three or four years. On Monday I shall attend a meeting with the MOD and representatives of the trade unions operating within the dockyard establishments in Portsmouth to argue the case for retaining jobs.

The Queen's Speech should have offered hope to the people of Britain; it should have offered an opportunity to bring together the divided nation that the Government have created. When I entered politics 15 years ago, I believed that politicians cared about people and improving the environment. I have spent those 15 years trying to live up to those ideals. I regret that my impression of the Queen's Speech is that those are not the aims of the Government. They want to widen the differences between the communities in Britain. They will make the lot of those whom we claim to serve a damn sight worse today than it was yesterday.

As I looked along the Treasury Bench, I did not see any spark of enthusiasm or ideal on the faces of Ministers. There was no sign of any real willingness to get to grips with the problems — only that bungalow-brained mentality that prevents the Chancellor of the Exchequer from trying to get to grips with the problems mounting around him. He stays on a single level and gives no hope to those who need his help.

The Speech does not make proper provision for the educational needs not only of children at school but of those in need of retraining. The leader of the Liberal party referred to the passage in the Queen's Speech that stated:

"A Bill will be introduced to give parents of children educated at public expense the right to exempt them from corporal punishment. My Government will continue to develop policies to raise educational standards."

Conservative Members who have been shouting could not have been present for our debate a couple of Fridays ago when we discussed the future of further education. There is a lack of enthusiasm and real willingness to develop further education. There is nothing in the Speech that encourages me and my constituents to believe that they will have any salvation from what the Government intend for education.

There is nothing in the Speech about the reform of school government or of making better provision for the Open University. Hon. Members who attended the education lobbies in the House a couple of weeks ago heard graphic descriptions of the problems that will face the Open University during the next two years. Can the Government really claim to care about the problems? In one breath they say, "We want you to train more technicians, to retrain the community and to offer greater opportunities for the use of the entrepeneurial skills available in the community." At the same time, they deny the Open University and other further education establishments the resources to carry out that training properly.

That Government——

Mr. Nicholas Winterton *rose*——

Mr. Hancock: I shall not give way. Conservative Members have had their say.

The Government must consider reform of the national insurance system and investment in the national infrastructure. There must be real investment to bring the new skills into reality.

The Government want to sell assets such as British Telecom. British Telecom set up a computer centre in my constituency in 1981 at a cost of £10 million, with planned expenditure in January and February next year of a further £5 million. What has happened? British Telecom last week announced to me and to the work force at the computer centre that it will close in 1986. Can that be good sense and good financial planning? Although £15 million has been expended on one computer centre, it is to be closed with the loss of 150 jobs.

If we must sell off assets such as British Telecom—and, it now appears, the National Bus Company—surely the money from that stripping of assets should be ploughed back into the community to provide retraining programmes, proper education and better health care.

The Queen's Speech is priced at 75p. Having read it, I believe it to be a rip-off not only in its cost, but of the people of Britain. If the Prime Minister and her colleagues genuinely believe that they have the medicine to solve our problems, I must tell them that the present dose that they are giving the country is not solving the problem, but is doing its best to kill us all and the very fabric of society that it should protect.

Are the Government determined to sit back and allow unemployment to escalate and the social consequences to overwhelm us? Are they offering us this Speech as their

programme for the next 12 months of government? If they are, there is damned little chance of salvation for any of those whom we represent.

7.10 pm

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): The Gracious Speech rightly refers to the concern which is felt by everyone about mass unemployment. The misery that is caused by massive unemployment is eating into the nation's moral fibre to a greater extent even than the debilitation of the welfare state. There have been many inquiries into and studies of the problem, and much consideration has been given on how to overcome it in the context of a free society of the sort that we enjoy, but we seem to be getting no nearer to solving the problem. Lord Beveridge did not anticipate long-term mass unemployment, and the proposals in his report do not cater for the problem.

It is proposed by some, including some of my hon. Friends, that we should make unemployment more endurable by introducing a higher rate of long-term benefit. I believe that that approach is misconceived and that we should concentrate on finding work, or at least activity, for those who become unemployed for structural industrial reasons.

The remedy advocated by my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) is to cut off unemployment benefit after six months and thereafter provide a guaranteed unskilled job at a fixed rate of pay. That appears to be a drastic remedy, but I believe that it lies in the right direction. I am sure that every hon. Member accepts that the average Briton does not want to be paid for doing nothing. We should provide a useful activity, and not a subsidy, so that an unemployed person can survive until he eventually obtains a normal job.

Work is essential for the self-respect of the average Briton and the Government should address themselves to the obligation of providing it. There are many jobs which could be done. we have only to look at our city streets and the derelict sites in our cities to see that there are opportunities for activity. We should say that unemployment pay will be conditional upon a willingness to work in any capacity to which the individual is directed. The Government should be addressing themselves to solving the problem in that way. They should believe no longer that the remedy for unemployment lies in unemployment pay and the supplementary benefits of the welfare state. We should seek to provide a role in society for those who are unable to obtain jobs in the normal way.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): There seems to be a slight contradiction in the Government's policy. They intend to go through a rate-capping exercise which will remove from local authority activity many of the useful jobs that could be done in our localities. The policies set out in the Gracious Speech will increase unemployment. That will be one of the consequences of a static wage. Why have the Government chosen not to use the mechanism which is available to them? The Prime Minister talks about bringing democracy closer to the people, and the people are well aware of the needs of society. The hon. Gentleman is saying that there should be curtailment on the one hand and expansion on the other.

Mr. Stanbrook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the constructive way in which he framed his intervention. He seems to accept that the solution to unemployment lies in financial payments. He spoke of rate-capping as a means of limiting the public funds that are made available. I am suggesting that the Government should concentrate instead on providing work, and not money. If we are hooked on the idea of providing extra money for those who find themselves unemployed, we shall be forced down the road which ends in frustration. That is not the way to end unemployment. We should endeavour to provide work by many means other than public finance, especially in the form of unemployment benefit.

If we break away from the idea of public finance, we shall find ourselves on the road that will lead to the defeat of unemployment. This is a large subject and the hon. Gentleman has his opinions, as I have mine. I believe that the way in which the Government have tackled the problem has neglected the necessity of realising that the object is to provide work, activity or gainful employment. Activity should have priority over the way in which unemployment benefit is financed.

I welcome the statement in the Gracious Speech that the Government

"will encourage the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland to consider how powers can be restored to local administration on a basis acceptable to all sides of the community."

I have no doubt that those words were carefully chosen. A restoration to local administration of power must mean the reinstitution of local government. The result of a historical accident is that Northern Ireland does not have a full structure of local government. The only local government bodies which exist in Northern Ireland are the equivalent of parish councils in Great Britain, and they have only limited powers. If the Government are suggesting in the Gracious Speech that a form of democracy can be returned at a higher level than that which now exists, we may be making progress towards something which will be acceptable and which will serve properly all the people of Northern Ireland.

I have always contended that it is wrong to approach Northern Ireland as a problem in itself and as if there is no Great Britain dimension. We all say that the problems of Northern Ireland will be solved by the Northern Ireland people in Northern Ireland. That is correct up to a point, if only the parties in Northern Ireland will agree to live and work together. If that happens we might solve the problem, but the parties will not be able to work together if we isolate them. If their problems, especially those of sectarian strife, are encapsulated in Northern Ireland and not diluted in a sea of tolerance of the United Kingdom, we shall not make progress. Constitutional development in Northern Ireland should be in the context of the United Kingdom as a whole. I have always believed that devolution to a local assembly in Northern Ireland is not the right approach. Integration on the basis of treating Northern Ireland as we treat Scotland and Wales, as regions of the United Kingdom, is the correct approach.

I hope that my interpretation of what is set out in the Gracious Speech on Northern Ireland is correct and that we shall be embarking on a policy of integration, starting with the restoration of local government at a higher level than that which now exists.

There is a reference in the Gracious Speech to the European Community. It is stated that the Government look forward to the future development of the European Community. That is fine, but we have been members of

[Mr. Stanbrook]

the European Community for over 10 years, the Community has been in existence for over 20 years, yet the idea of the European Community has not been given a fair chance to succeed. Even now obstacles to trade, to the movement of goods and to free methods of transport within the Community abound.

It is still not possible to take a lorry on to the continent without a permit. Permits are strictly limited. Manufacturers and other traders in the United Kingdom who wish to go across to Europe to sell their goods are baffled by forms and the need to comply with regulations. The French Government limit much of the trade that could pass between the United Kingdom and Europe simply by refusing to issue more than a limited number of permits for lorries and other vehicles. If that is the case after we have been a member state for 10 years, it is one of the gravest reasons for Britain not having enjoyed a share of the European Community's success.

Another obstacle in the way of British participation in and appreciation of the opportunities of the Common Market is demonstrated by the development of the European Assembly. Those who devised the idea of a European Parliament were keen for political progress to be made and were over-ambitious. As a result, they sought direct elections to that body sooner than many states would have accepted them, and sooner than was good for them.

We are represented in the Assembly by two Members of this Parliament. All the other United Kingdom representatives have no formal, and in most cases no personal, contact with hon. Members. That is a great mistake, and it has led to the isolation of the European Community and its parliamentary tier. It would have been better if we had insisted upon representation by the parties represented in this House.

Representatives would be elected to the Assembly every Session and would serve for a Session at a time. Each of us could have direct and practical experience of the European Community's problems. We would, therefore, be able to pray that experience in aid in all our discussions involving the Community.

Unfortunately — this is carried through into the privileges and protocol of the House and our provision for strangers and guests — there is a tendency to keep members of the European Assembly at arm's length and not to give them those rights to which they are entitled as fellow legislators for this country, albeit at a different level.

Hong Kong is something of a success story for the United Kingdom Government. The Prime Minister deserves great credit — as she does for the similiar success achieved in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe—for achieving an agreement with the Republic of China, but I am worried about the proposal for a special category of citizenship to replace British dependent territories citizenship in Hong Kong after the transfer of sovereignty. The Government appear to have overcome the problem of those who will not be wholehearted citizens of the Republic of China after 1997 by saying that there will be a residual category of citizenship. People in that category will not be entitled to British citizenship, and therefore to the right of abode in the United Kingdom, but will be entitled to British diplomatic and consular protection when outside Hong Kong and China.

That status will be almost unique, in that people will be entitled to British and Chinese diplomatic protection. In one case they will be claimed as full citizens of Britain, and in another they will be kept from Britain. In some respects, I believe that our British nationality law is not as definitive as it should be after the passage of the British Nationality Act 1981. When these proposals are framed in legislation, they will have to be subjected to close examination.

The Government have made faltering steps towards their objectives. They have an outstanding leader, but they have been buffeted by internal and external enemies whose strength has often been underestimated . The Government have displayed great courage in many respects. Their policies and personalities are much better than any available alternatives, and they certainly deserve our support.

7.25 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to speak on the first day of the debate on the Gracious Speech. Regrettably, the Speech is addressed to two nations.

In paragraph one on page 3 of the Gracious Speech the Government say that they remain deeply concerned about unemployment. The Government also tell us that they will continue their economic policies. Does anyone believe that a continuation of those economic policies will have a large effect on cutting unemployment? Does anyone on either side of the House really believe that? Certainly the youngsters referred to last Thursday in my local paper do not. The *Pontefract and Castleford Express* ran the headline "Jobless Young Losing Hope", and that is what is happening.

Serious economic and political problems arise in mining communities, such as mine. My constituency depends upon coal mining and other forms of traditional manufacturing. As we are all aware, that is not uncommon in the north. I stress the problems, feelings and frustrations in areas like the one I represent when people, especially the young, look to the future and wonder what it holds for them. How many can look forward to a secure job in a decent environment? Will our present economic policy at least start to solve the problem?

I do not apologise for once again drawing the attention of the House to the particular problems of my constituency and the Castleford travel-to-work area within it. In 1979, the unemployment rate was 6·5 per cent. Since then, it has steadily grown to its present level of 14 per cent. I am well aware that the constituencies of many hon. Members experience much higher unemployment rates. This is a great problem.

In October, in the small towns of Pontefract and Castleford, of 839 youths unemployed, 694 had not been employed since they left school. The 839 were chasing five vacancies in the jobcentres within the Castleford travel-to-work area. What hope have those youths? This year there has been a 50 per cent. increase in the number of children leaving school who are unable to obtain jobs compared with 1983. There has been an overall increase of 50 per cent. in unemployment in the five years since 1979. The trend is still rising, and that is where the major problems arise.

Before the miners' strike, it had been agreed through the normal procedures — not like the Cortonwood procedure—that two pits in my constituency would be

closed, one fully and the other partially. That would have meant the loss of 1,000 jobs for the small towns of Castleford and Pontefract. During the strike there has been a tragic fire at the coal face in the Fryston colliery which employs 1,200 men, and that raises a question mark about the life of the colliery.

There are many great problems. The most tragic is that nearly half the registered unemployed are young people under the age of 24. That has been the position for three years. The figure would be considerably higher if those youngsters who are unable to find permanent jobs but who work on temporary Government schemes were included. What does the future hold for those young people who, through no fault of their own, have nothing to look forward to, and whose plight is all too common in many parts of the north today?

I mean no disrespect when I say to hon. Members who represent and live in southern constituencies that, while I fully accept that they are worried about trends in the country and unemployed people, unless they live among and represent them, they cannot appreciate the tragedy that is occurring every day.

The deep-rooted economic problems of the north stem from a dependence upon a narrow range of industries which are shedding jobs, particularly coal mining, glass and chemicals. Only last year the glass container industry, which has been a traditional industry in the area, has closed its major United Glass factory not because there was no demand for the goods, but because the company decided to move it south. The jobs were available, but they were taken from north to south.

We have had eight months of a tragic strike in the coal industry, but some day that strike must end. I accept that some pits will have to close. Just outside my constituency we are blessed with the massive Selby coalfield project, we are all pleased about that. The Selby complex is to mine 10 million tonnes of coal a year. Before the strike, the north Yorkshire, area with its 16,000 employees, was mining 10 million tonnes of coal. If 10 million tonnes is to be mined by 4,000 men at Selby, what will happen to the other 12,000 men? One can argue that it will be more efficient than it is now. That is probably so, but what will happen to the mining communities?

The area lacks a strong tradition of small manufacturing industry which might provide a firm foundation for the growth of new firms. The lack of new technology-based industry povides little hope for the growth of new employment opportunities to replace jobs lost in traditional industries.

Massive environmental dereliction resulting from the activities of the mining industry forms a major barrier to the attraction of new industry. How do the Government see the programme that they have outlined in the Queen's Speech—if it is a programme to attack unemployment—benefiting constituencies such as mine and the many similar areas to be found throughout large parts of the north, and in Scotland and Wales? Have they any definite proposals which will alleviate the distress and despair faced by so many of my constituents?

I have five points to put to the Government and Conservative Members. The first is on regional policy. I understand that later this month the Government will announce their new regional policy. I appreciate that they will not tell us what it is until the appropriate time. Can they assure us that they have taken the real needs of areas, such as the coalfields, fully into account when deciding that policy?

We have heard a great deal about NCB Enterprises Ltd. I welcome that. Such enterprises are essential if we are to attack the unemployment that will be created in the mining industries. I understand that only £5 million is to be put into the company. Without appearing churlish, I should like to point out that £40 million was set aside for a similar company set up by the British Steel Corporation—BSC Limited. Can the responsible Minister tell me how the company will operate and why such a seemingly paltry sum of £5 million is deemed sufficient to tackle the serious economic problems of the declining coalfield communities?

We are still no nearer to having a sensible energy policy. The Government seem determined to develop more nuclear-powered electricity generating stations to the detriment of the coal industry. We are all aware that before the strike 80 per cent. of the coal industry's output went to power stations. Have the Government thought about the consequences for coal mining areas if the market for coal is lost? Perhaps we could have a statement from whoever is responsible?

Have the Government made any attempt to persuade the European Community of the needs of the coalfield areas? My constituency, because it is not an assisted area—although it should be — is currently barred from receiving assistance from the European Community regional development fund. Will the Government suggest that the European Commission puts forward a programme for rejuvenating the older coalfields as they have for other non-assisted areas of west Yorkshire which are dependent upon textiles? I should like the Goverment to pursue that point.

On local government, it is the Government's firm intention to abolish the Greater London council and the metropolitan councils. Many local authorities, including the West Yorkshire metropolitan county council and the Wakefield metropolitan district council, are pursuing successful economic development programmes and creating jobs at far less cost than Government schemes. The county council estimates that its investment programme creates 18 times as many jobs for the same amount of money as the Government's regional policy expenditure—£2,000 per job, compared with £35,000 per job. Surely the Government should reward such efficiency rather than try to abolish it. Those authorities have a major part to play.

The Government regard it as sufficient repeatedly to tell the House and the country that the rewards available for miners prepared to accept redundancy are far greater than any other industrial workers have ever received. No one can refute that, because it is a fact. The problem, however, is not the older generation of miners, who will be cushioned by redundancy payments, but the school leavers who would normally have followed their fathers into the pits. If we are not very careful, the problems created in the mining areas will not just be economic. If those young kids see no light at the end of the way and no possible future employment, they will look for a system that will give them employment—and their thoughts may well turn to a system other than the democratic system that we all enjoy. That may seem like wild scaremongering, but the threat is there. In my view, if sticking rigidly to purely

[Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse]

economic policies may create a situation in which anarchy and upset threaten the democratic system, it just is not worth it.

The Government must find a way of providing employment throughout the nation, especially for young people. Before pushing harder and harder to get their way and close much of the mining industry, if that is what they intend, they had better put something in its place. If they do not do that, an extremely serious situation will arise. Although the Government have told us nothing beyond the fact that they intend to continue the economic policy that has created unemployment throughout the nation, I hope that they will think again.

7.43 pm

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): I pay tribute to the thoughtful speech of the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) and his recognition that Members from the south are as aware of the tragedy of unemployment as those from the north.

The Gracious Speech rightly begins by, and can perhaps be summed up as, stressing the preservation of peace and security and steady expansion. Happily, it begins by recognising the importance of peace negotiations between East and West. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, we hope that the visits of two Soviet leaders to this country will help in that process. Let us never forget, however, that the negotiations must always be backed by our own strength and that of NATO as a whole so that any negotiations take place on an equal footing.

The Gracious Speech rightly emphasises the importance of our influence and defence interests outside as well as inside NATO and outside the NATO area. This is of great importance in that we are a maritime nation, and that was proved in the Falklands exercise.

I also welcome the reference to Portugal and Spain, although I recognise, as I am sure the whole House recognises, that admitting Spain to the EEC will involve considerable problems, especially in agriculture. Nevertheless, the presence of the Iberian peninsula in both NATO and the EEC will give the West an even stronger basis to ensure non-aggression from the East.

It has been suggested by the Opposition that the change in regime in Argentina may make it easier to proceed with negotiations on the Falklands, but I wish to add a note of caution. We must consider not just the present regime but any future regime. In all our deliberations, therefore, it is vital that the interests and sovereignty of the Falklands should be preserved. The same applies to Hong Kong. My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) referred to some of the difficulties regarding citizenship in the future of Hong Kong that we shall encounter when we come to deal with that matter.

We all approve of the Government's proposals for the GLC, but an immense amount of legislation will be required to cover all areas of its activity. For instance, appointments to various public bodies are made by the GLC and many other smaller matters will have to be considered when the legislation comes before the House.

The Gracious Speech stresses the importance of reducing inflation still further. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson), too, stressed the importance of sound money policy. At the same time, we must show our concern—indeed, we must do more than show concern—about the level of unemployment. Again, I was impressed by the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington. It is jobs, not money, that we need. There is a great deal of difference between giving people money and giving them jobs. I look to the Government to continue to seek to provide jobs rather than cash for those who wish to work but are unfortunate enough to be unemployed. I hope that small businesses, which are increasing as a result of Government encouragement, will play a significant part in solving the unemployment problem.

Taxation reform has been mentioned many times and appears once again in the Gracious Speech. I have always urged a shift from direct to indirect taxation because the latter is more economic and extremely difficult to avoid. Moreover, it is a tax on spending and not on saving. I hope that the Government will pursue that further.

The voting changes outlined in the Gracious Speech have been pressed many times by private Members and others and we shall all be glad to see them implemented.

On Northern Ireland, I listened carefully to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington. After the abolition of Stormont, which I believe was a mistake, the Government must think carefully about giving the people of Northern Ireland some form of expression within their province rather than directly through this country. It would be advisable to introduce a form of revised Stormont.

The Government must face the problems of law and order and unemployment. Both are major issues and affect, not the Conservative party, the Liberal party or the Labour party, but the whole country. We must face those dangers, and I am sure that the Government will match up to that great challenge.

I listened with care to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Stokes) about the benefits of living in this country. When one travels abroad and sees violence all over the world, one recognises those benefits. The measures laid down in the Gracious Speech will lead us on the right road to recovery and make us a better nation where the fear of external aggression is removed and living standards are improved.

I welcome the Gracious Speech. I am only afraid of the final sentence which states:

"Other measures will be laid before you."

May I say to the Leader of the House that we do not want more legislation, but we want more discussion on major issues.

7.51 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): The Queen's Speech represents yet another dose of the same old medicine. As I listened to the debate I wondered whether, if intelligent creatures from another planet came to the Palace of Westminster and listened to the Queen reading her speech, they would believe that they were visiting a country with almost 4 million unemployed and which is in the throes of the longest and most bitter strikes in any of its major industries. The Government's response to those problems is more of the same old medicine which has clearly failed, more confrontation and division, more of the economic policies which have caused unemployment and provoked the miners' strike, more cuts in public investment and more privatisation of public assets.

An examination of the Government's track record on selling off public property shows that practically no industry is exempt. Oil, gas, aerospace, shipbuilding, telecommunications, aspects of car manufacturing, forestry, housing and local government services have all been involved. The Government now have an insane proposal to extend privatisation to bus services, without a thought for the deterioration in transport services, especially in remote areas, or the detrimental effect on jobs in the bus manufacturing industry.

Some industries are left in my constituency, but much of the area has been deindustrialised because of the Government's policies. One remaining major industrial employer is Walter Alexander's, coach builders in Falkirk. Recently it declared a further 150 redundancies. When I met management and trade union representatives, there was virtual unanimity between them that Government policies were directly to blame for the problems. They believed that the policy of privatisation outlined in the Government's then White Paper would have an even more disastrous effect, and it was produced without an iota of consultation with the bus manufacturing industry.

I had hoped to have a meeting with the Secretary of State for Scotland, who was a signatory to the White Paper and who is responsible for transport in Scotland. I wrote to him and suggested that I meet him and the trade union representatives of the work force at Walter Alexander's to discuss the possible effects of the legislation before it was drafted. A junior minister—one of the other lackeys at the Scottish Office—wrote me a cheeky and curt reply to say that such a meeting was unnecessary. That was an insult to the work force, to the industry and to my hon. Friends and myself who requested the meeting. Scottish Office Ministers are incapable of defending their decisions, or those taken for them in Whitehall, either in Parliament or outside. That is why they refuse to meet elected representatives of such work forces to discuss employment prospects.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. MacKay) is present on the Front Bench. I draw his attention to the fact that there is no reference to the National Health Service in the Queen's Speech. However, even the NHS is not exempt from the Government's privatisation mania. The hon. Gentleman recently sent a circular to all Scottish health boards telling them to put certain services out to tender. There is widespread protest about that. We must fight for meaningful jobs, and even more so for patient care. Where privatisation of the NHS has been tried, it has often led to inferior standards of hygiene and patient care.

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): Does my hon. Friend agree that many of the health board members who share the Minister's political view regard the proposals as imprudent and impractical for the care of patients and the better running of hospital services?

Mr. Canavan: My hon. Friend is correct. That is why I urge all members of health boards, whatever their political persuasion—I suspect that many are Tory-party place men and women—to throw the Minister's circular in the bucket, where it belongs. They should defy it completely. That would not even involve the risk of breaking the law which many councillors may have to face, because the circular is not legally binding.

It is feared that if what the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute calls the ancillary parts of the NHS are privatised, that will be the thin end of the wedge and will eventually lead to the complete privatisation of the NHS. The NHS was set up 36 years ago on the principle of establishing a free and comprehensive service for all, irrespective of the ability to pay.

Similarly, there is a fear about the future of the National Coal Board. It was set up at about the same time as the NHS. Until recently it would have been almost unthinkable for a Government to consider denationalising the coal industry. Just as there was a consensus in favour of a free and comprehensive NHS, so there was a broad consensus in favour of the public ownership of an important industry such as the coal industry. Yet there is now a fear among many of those employed by the NCB that the very existence of that organisation may be at stake.

There may even be something sinister in the statement in the Queen's Speech that

> "In order to promote efficiency and growth, my Government will continue their policies of exposing State-owned businesses to competition and, where appropriate, returning them to the private sector."

There is a widespread and growing feeling that MacGregor was appointed as chairman of the NCB to preside over its ultimate privatisation — to close down what he calls "uneconomic pits" and to sell off the remaining profitable pits, thereby turning the clock back beyond the 1940s when the industry was taken into public ownership.

The Prime Minister had the gall to tell us that she has every confidence in Ian MacGregor. Imagine anyone having every confidence in a clown who turns up for serious negotiations with a plastic bag over his head! How can anybody have any confidence in a character such as that?

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): Would it not have been better for the negotiations had he kept the plastic bag over his head?

Mr. Canavan: My hon. Friend may have a valid point there. Even some people in high management positions within the NCB have no confidence at all in MacGregor and some of the others on the board. It is fairly obvious that heads must roll. When MacGregor's head rolls, perhaps we should put it back into the plastic bag and send it on a free transfer back to America. We shall be only too glad to get rid of him.

During the recess I attended many meetings and rallies with miners and visited strike centres in many parts of Scotland. Based on that experience, and having spoken to many miners and their families, I believe that their morale is now stronger than nine months ago when the strike began. Even if the strike continues through the hard winter months, the miners will survive and win. They deserve to win, because they are fighting for their jobs and their industry. Indeed, they are fighting for an industry which is the property of the nation.

The only part of the speech of the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Dr. Glyn) with which I agreed was his assertion that people wanted jobs, not just money. He is absolutely correct. But what are MacGregor and the Prime Minister offering the miners? I am glad that the miners have not accepted Judas money. For far too long, when Members of Parliament and trade union leaders have tried to lead the fight against proposed redundancies, workers have been going in by the back door, accepting redundancy money and selling their jobs, which are also the jobs of the community.

[Mr. Canavan]

It is about time that trend stopped. That is why I congratulate Arthur Scargill and the NUM on showing a lead to the entire Labour and trade union movement. That is why they deserve the wholehearted support of all Labour Members. I hope that even some reasonable Conservative Members will give their support.

Several hon. Members have referred to the legislative burden that might arise from the Queen's Speech. I have not counted the exact number of Bills proposed, but some hon. Members have said that the legislative burden may not be quite as heavy as it has been in recent years. In any event, I suspect that in this forthcoming Session our priorities and the parliamentary timetable will be increasingly dictated by events outside this House. My fear is that the majority of hon. Members will become increasingly out of touch with outside events and the people whom we were elected to represent. I suspect that that will be even truer in Scotland, where by no stretch of the imagination could this Government ever argue that they received a mandate, having clearly been rejected by more than 70 per cent. of the people at the last general election.

The basis and continuation of democracy rest very much on the principle that the people should express their consent to the laws and policies by which they are governed. If we really believe in the future of parliamentary democracy—I do, as do the Opposition—we should remember that it will not be enhanced by the continuing destruction of local democracy and the imposition of the divisive, provocative policies contained in this Queen's Speech.

8.7 pm

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me so soon in this Parliament. I hope that hon. Members will forgive me if I do not follow them, but I wish to raise an entirely different aspect of the Queen's Speech.

The Gracious Speech states that the

"Government will continue to work for a settlement in Namibia, a solution to the Arab/Israel dispute and the restoration of the independence and non-aligned status of Afghanistan."

The whole House will applaud that declaration as far as it goes because it displays a concern for troubled areas whose problems threaten the stability of the world and in which there has been much human suffering. I use the phrase "as far as it goes" because there is a glaring omission which I am certain will cause much grief, certainly among many of my constituents. There is no mention of Cyprus. There is no declaration that the Government will continue to work for a settlement in Cyprus, a solution to the Greek-Turkish-Cypriot dispute and the restoration of an independent and sovereign republic of Cyprus.

Exactly 10 years ago, in the autumn of 1974, during the debate on the Gracious Speech of that year, I raised the tragedy that had suddenly befallen Cyprus. Many hon. Members will recall that in the summer of 1974 a coup d'etat was attempted against the Government of Archbishop Makarios inspired by the military regime then ruling Greece. Apart from rescuing the archbishop, the British Government of the day did nothing, and our troops remained locked up in the sovereign bases. The Turkish Government therefore decided to go it alone, invaded Cyprus, thwarted the coup d'etat, but in the event remained in occupation of one third of the most fertile part of that island. Two hundred thousand people were driven from their homes into exile, some coming to my constituency where they still are today. I was highly critical of the British Government of the day. I considered that they had betrayed our obligations under the treaty of guarantee, in which we promised, jointly with Greece and Turkey, to uphold and protect the sovereignty, integrity and independence of the republic of Cyprus. Despite that, we remained supine, and as a result the island remains divided. My views were endorsed by a Select Committee over a year later.

Since then very little progress has been made. Indeed, with the passage of time, a solution seems to become more remote and the situation more rigid, and the attitudes of the communities have polarised. This time last year, the Turkish Cypriots issued a unilateral declaration of independence. Our Government immediately condemned this, and took a leading part in ensuring that the declaration was not recognised by the United Nations. We welcomed this forthright, energetic action by the Government. Subsequently, the United Nations has passed resolutions urging both sides to compromise. Two rounds of talks have broken down, and the divide between the leaders of the two communities remain deep and wide. The internal politics and difficulties of the two sides have not helped.

A third round of talks is due to start in New York on 26 November. For many observers, this is the last real opportunity for reaching a solution. The situation is desperate. Therefore, I hope that the absence of reference to Cyprus in the Gracious Speech does not mean that the Government's policy is not to do all that is possible to bring about a just settlement. I know that that is not the case, and I hope that Ministers will confirm this some time during the debate.

Only on Friday evening I received a deputation representing the entire spectrum of political opinion within Cyprus, and I receive countless letter, on this score. Their plea is for the British Government to use all their moral power and standing to try to ensure that a just settlement to the Cypus problem is reached, so that ordinary people can go back to their homeland and and see their relatives, whom they have not seen for 10 years.

Our obligations under the treaty of guarantee remain, and it is high time that we showed positively that we intend to live up to them.

8.12 pm

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Some robust and partisan speeches have been made from the Conservative Benches. I do not argue about the right of Conservative Members to continue to speak in that way, because I intend to do the same.

The hon. Member for Boothferry (Sir P. Bryan) suggested that his constituancy was a microcosm of Britain today. That is why he and his right hon. and hon Friends fail to see the reality of the world outside. Labour Members have brought to the attention of the House the divisions that exist in our society, and the almost daily widening of those divisions.

Since 1979, the Government have waged a war against the workers on a wide range of matters. Each succeeding Gracious Speech has given no sign of there being anything in the mind of this Government that will begin to tackle the problems that lie at the heart of the crisis that we have faced since the end of the 1960s. The difficulties that we

have been debating today did not emerge in the past five or six years. When the post-war boom was tapering off in the 1960s, there was a transformation in British parliamentary politics in the 1970s, again in a crisis, that ended the term of office of the then Tory Government.

The election in 1979 of this Government brought about a recognition that the consensus politics of the post-war period with the mixed economy and all that went with it had ended, and that concessionary capitalism was no longer in the business of conceding. I do not necessarily blame the Government, who are there to defend and protect the system under which we live, at the expense of the working people. So that they could stabilise, for however brief a period, the economy of capitalism,it was necessary for the Government not simply to restrain workers in terms of their pursuit of better living standards and conditions of work and wages but to claw back from the working class the advances made by progressive legislation over many years. We are talking not simply about the advances made in the past decade or two, but about the advances in living standards and rights over many years. Day by day, the right of the masses of the people are being eroded by the Government.

The two things are linked because the Government, so that they can proceed with a policy of reducing the living standards of the working class, have first to tackle the shield that protects and defends the working class—the trade unions. We have seen an attack on that shield since 1980 when legislation was introduced by the Government to weaken the trade union movement and therefore remove that shield.

As a result, we have seen the greatest example of industrial unrest that the country has witnessed since the general strike. As my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) said, the miners' strike symbolises the ever-growing divisions and confrontations occurring in our society. The Government appear to be hellbent on pursuing that line regardless of the consequences.

As our debates on the Gracious Speech will show, there is nothing in that document that gives any hope of a solution to the central problem. Every speech so far, from whichever side of the House, has referred to the cancer of unemployment. I have some experience of unemployment. When I was not re-elected in 1979 I became unemployed and spent the next four years on the dole. So I can talk from first-hand experience about unemployment.

An area such as Merseyside is much more a microcosm of our divided society and of the reality of Britain under this Government. We have seen a long catalogue of closures and redundancies which have brought unemployment up to the level of 20 per cent. and more. In some parts of Merseyside it is not uncommon to find levels of 50 per cent., 60 per cent. and even 70 per cent.

People who have decided to defend their jobs have been made criminals by laws passed here in Parliament. Those Cammell Laird workers who occupied a rig were not fighting for better wages and conditions. They were fighting to retain jobs in an area devastated by the policies that this Government have been pursuing since 1979.In that sense, Birkenhead has worse employment records than even Liverpool, but it is mainly overshadowed by the attention given to Liverpool. Those men know that the shipyard represents the biggest potential employer in the area.

The ordinary man or woman in the street asks when the devastation of our industrial base and jobs will end. They want to know when someone will do something about it, and they respond in the only way that they see open to them. In the case of Cammell Laird, it was to take action to occupy a rig. Those men took that action to demonstrate that they were not prepared to see more jobs disappear. It must be remembered, too, that it is not just their jobs that they are fighting to protect; it is the jobs of their children and grandchildren. A job is not necessarily the property of the person who has it at the time. It is the property of succeeding generations of job seekers who will find in Thatcher's Britain hopelessness and despair facing them when they leave school and try to find work. Again there is nothing in the Gracious Speech to suggest that young people can look for even a glimmer of hope from the Government.

It may be that the miners' strike is the best example of the polarisation that we see taking place, and Government supporters should realise that it is a time bomb. Coming from their lush constituencies, they fail to recognise that the divided Britain that we are discussing has within it dramatic differences in living standards, hope, employment and industry. The north-east, parts of Lancashire, parts of Yorkshire, Scotland and Wales all face great difficulties and as a consequence face human misery because they are without hope.

I want to see the same sort of commitment to the ideas and ideologies upon which the Labour party was based. I want the Opposition to start fighting with the same sort of conviction as Government supporters fight for their class. I want to see the Labour party offering the people a real alternative and the beginning of a transformation in society which takes on board the problems facing women and young people in the community. I want to see the Labour party begin to tackle mass unemployment in a positive way. I want to see the problems of the National Health Service, education and hopelessness tackled with the vigour that Government supporters tackle the interests of their class.

I do not believe that any of this partition will end until we see an end of the present Government and the election of a Labour Government committed to policies which will begin that transformation and bring about a more just society. It will not happen if there is constant reliance on making the capitalist system work better than the capitalists themselves can make it work. We have seen examples of that in France. With good intentions, a Socialist Government came to power and tried to deal with the problems endemic to the capitalist system by retaining capitalism as the economic power centre. We have seen the failures following in its wake.

We have to be self-critical about some of the actions of past Labour Governments. We are in a crisis, and no one can see the end of it. Government supporters say that the crisis is worldwide. I agree with them, because the countries to which they refer have the same problem. They are all countries based on the capitalist economy. In that sense there is a common problem throughout the capitalist world.

Nothing in this Queen's Speech offers any hope. The only hope of any future for the country is an end to this Government and the election of a Labour Government committed to Socialist policies.

8.27 pm

Sir Frederic Bennett (Torbay): I listened with considerable care to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden). Although my own few remarks will be directed to a different part of the Queen's Speech, it is obvious to me that the hon. Gentleman spoke with great sincerity but not with great understanding if he really believes that it is class distinctions which are causing the economic and social problems facing any country, with whatever political shade of Government, which is moving from an industrial era into a technological one.

There were moments in the hon. Gentleman's speech when I wished that he had concentrated on that aspect, because I should have liked an opportunity to ask him, for instance, if he really thought that the present miners' strike was helping to create jobs rather than to destroy them. Can he really put his hand on his heart and say that the miners' tactics leading to the closure of mines which might otherwise have remained open are making a practical contribution to the solution of the problems about which he talked about and of which I have a considerable sympathetic understanding?

I wish that one day we could have a serious debate in the House, without these accusations of class and partisanship, about what we should all like to see done in the face of change in a world which is moving from an industrial era into a technological era, where in future one man or woman will be fully capable of doing the jobs which 13 or 14 people did before.

It so happens that my work as leader of British delegations to the assemblies of Western European Union and the Council of Europe has given me first-hand experience of what has occurred in France. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the French have tried out nationalisation in wide areas, yet they are now having to follow economic and social policies such as ours. That is a fact. It has happened.

The hon. Gentleman could not have directed his mind to what is happening in China. I know China well and it went in, full-bloodedly, for the sort of policies which I am sure the hon. Gentleman would like. However, degree by degree it is abandoning those policies in favour of a return to individual enterprise.

One day in the House I should like to hear a debate free of accusations across the Benches; a debate on how to deal with the problems of moving from the past to a completely different future. That move will not be made by strikes or rhetoric. It will require completely new thinking, on our society, on working ages, and so on. It will not be achieved by counter— accusations and by claims that under a Labour Government 4 million unemployed will disappear within a short time. With respect, that is nonsense. I was tempted to comment on the hon. Gentleman's speech only because I recognise the apparent sincerity with which he spoke.

Normally, I would have hoped to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the relevant debate on foreign affairs and defence, which is to take place later in the week. This is the first time for 20 years that I have sought to speak on the day of the Queen's Speech. However, as a result of other duties I cannot be here later in the week, so I want to spend a few minutes now on what is not a very controversial problem.

The second paragraph in the Queen's Speech says:

"My Government consider as their highest priority the maintenance of national security and the preservation of peace. They will accordingly continue to play an active part in the Atlantic Alliance. They will promote Western defence interests outside the NATO area. They will make vigorous efforts to combat international terrorism."

Certain things have been happening in the past few months which have altered the international scene. In the past four or five years I have been a member of two international bodies. One of those is the Western European Union defence assembly, which had become largely moribund.

Public opinion in several European countries, including Britain, has subordinated defence and security considerations as the result of skilful propaganda, sometimes unconscious propaganda, suggesting that Europe is no more than a battlefield between the two super-powers. That view is found widely in Germany and is not limited to any one political party. People there ask why they should provide an advance battlefield for a war between the two super-powers. In Britain, people — I am not talking about pacifists as such—ask why we should be treated as the unsinkable aircraft carrier. So one finds shades of differing opinion in Europe.

We in western Europe have decided that we have again to convince the people of Europe that if they are to spend money and devote their lives to defending peace and security they will have to do so on the basis that it is their peace and security that they are defending and that they are not being treated merely as an advance battlefield between the two super-powers. That is against a political background of Governments in Europe of all different shades of opinion.

It was for that reason that in Rome, less than 10 days ago, the Secretaries of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and for Defence contributed to the Rome Declaration. In that, they recreated the old concept of NATO, long since nearly forgotten, that Atlantic defence was pre-eminent, but had to be composed of two pillars: one, North America — Canada and the United States — but equally, countries, political parties, men and women forming the European pillar of defence who did not think that they were merely a pawn between the two super-powers in preserving their security and lives by the methods they were adopting. Ten days ago I thought how remarkable it was that that idea had caught on so quickly. Our alliance is not one between a super-power and a number of smaller allied countries which it is tied to defend, but one in which Europe as such has an interest in its own self-defence.

I sat next to a prominent French Socialist politician at a dinner only a few days ago and I asked him why the French had not had to endure or experience the efforts of the CND lobby, the pacifists, the neutralists and the "better red than dead" brigade. He told me that it was because they had succeeded, as we in the rest of Europe had not, in convincing the French people that they should spend money and devote their lives to defending their own interests and that they were not merely part of a wider pattern.

The French have had none of our troubles. In France today even the Communist party, let alone the Socialist party, votes in favour of retaining not only strong defences but its own sovereign nuclear deterrent. That is not because the French intend to invade Russia, but because successive French Governments, including the present Socialist Government, have convinced their people that if

they have to erect a deterrent defence it is to defend their interests and not simply as part of a wider pattern of a conflict between the two super-powers.

Again, I regret that I cannot make this speech during the relevant debate but I have to continue my limited work in the reincarnation of the European defence of Europe. I could be asked why it is that NATO cannot do this all on its own. It cannot for the reasons that I have just explained. Of course we have to keep NATO. NATO is essential, because there is simply no way that Western defence can be maintained without it. But within NATO we must also develop a concept of European self-defence.

It is interesting that two countries with Socialist Governments—Spain and Portugal—within a few hours of the Rome declaration being made, said that while they were within NATO they still wanted to join the newly revived Western European Union. They were not Right-wing, but they also wanted to develop the idea of rebuilding the traditional concept, now 25 years old, that NATO is composed of two pillars, not one dominant partner, although the one partner is, of course, dominant in its military capacity.

On the political side, Europe is starting to believe again that it has a duty to defend itself, irrespective of any other considerations. Norway is already knocking on the door and one or two other countries may wish to join the new WEU. I thought that the Americans would be depressed by these developments, but they are not. On the whole, they welcome the idea of Europe taking on a greater capacity to defend itself.

The Rome declaration ends:

"They will promote Western defence interests outside the NATO area."

That is possible under the Brussels treaty, but not under the NATO treaty, which has strict geographical boundaries. It is interesting that seven countries of mixed political attitudes agreed that the defence of Europe cannot be viewed in isolation. What happens in the Gulf and in other places affects the lives and livelihoods of everyone in Europe.

References have been made to the European Parliament. I do not believe that that Parliament has a role to play, because it is not representative of or responsible to national parliaments. It is directly elected and has members from countries, such as Ireland, which, for their own good reasons, do not wish to become involved in the East-West strategy of defence and deterrence. I am not prepared to see British defence and security interests handed over to a body which is not responsible to my Parliament. I am sure that other hon. Members share that view.

I look forward to the growth of the idea that people should start to believe again in western Europe as such and recognise that in spending money on defence they are defending themselves and not merely serving the interests of one of the super-powers.

8.42 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): The hon. Member for Torbay (Sir F. Bennett) asked that we should not discuss class and partisan issues. It was strange that such a plea should be made by the supporter of a Government whose policies have had such an effect on ordinary, working-class people that they have spelt out to the nation what it means to be partisan and class conscious.

I am disappointed by the Queen's Speech, because it offers more of the same. For many areas of this country, the news is bad. There is no hope for the poor, the unemployed, school leavers and people waiting for operations.

It is a great pity that we have to continue with policies that are blind obeisance to an economic strategy that is proving a disaster for democracy and the sharing of economic wealth.

The people of Sheffield feel as though they are looked on as part of the Third world, to be used and discarded as necessary. I echo the views of the Bishop of Sheffield who spoke out recently about the Government's economic policies and their effects on his people. Churchmen are prompted to speak out when they see the devastation in many parts of the country.

The Bishop of Sheffield suggested that if the Queen had a home in the north and visited the area, that would help to solve the problem. I spoke at the weekend to people who are unemployed and some who are on strike, and they had no strong feelings about a royal visit, but they knew that such a visit would not solve any problems. Talk of royal visits and so on reinforces our feeling that we are part of what I call the London commonwealth: if the natives are restless, send the Queen on a visit and that will placate them. That will not work. It is no good patronising people or making noises about being worried about unemployment, while continuing to endorse policies that have created most of the misery being experienced in areas such as Sheffield, Derbyshire, Wales and Scotland. That approach will not work.

The Government cannot make their policies work by suppressing our democratic rights. The Queen's Speech refers to controlling the economy and public expenditure and abolishing the GLC and the metropolitan county councils. In effect, the Government say, "If a democratic body causes us problems, we shall remove it. If there are rumblings, we will suppress them and call it law and order."

The claim that local authorities are causing the problems is nothing less than a lie. The surveys on rates are clear. Industrialists have to pay more in rates on factories and warehouses in areas that are not being penalised than they do in the 18 rate-capped authorities. For example, the rates on 10,000 sq ft of warehouse in rate-capped Sheffield, with a rateable value of £1·08 per sq ft, would be £10,800 a year. In unpenalised areas, such as Reading and Enfield, with rateable values of £1·23 per sq ft, the rates are £12,300 a year. It is misleading to say that high rates are creating the mass exodus of industries from the north. The true reasons are the absence of investment, the fact that factories are not encouraged to remain in the north and the general malaise that has been deliberately created by the Government.

South Yorkshire county council has intervened to try to keep some of our people in decent jobs with good pay and trade union conditions. It has fought for years to maintain a policy of cheap bus fares, so that the unemployed and those on low pay get around, and a policy of free fares for old-age pensioners, so that they can visit their children and see other parts of the county. The county council has fought for those policies and the Government have condemned it to the dustbin. The council has committed no crime; it has merely carried out its policies and spoken on behalf of people in the area.

[Mr. Bill Michie]

None of those policies will work. In the short term, they may appear to work. It may be possible to suppress people by throwing them out of work, to frighten them by taking away their trade union rights or to keep children on the dole for so long that they believe that that is where they should be for the rest of their lives, but sooner or later the tide will turn. More than one hon. Member has spelt out what the Government must do. If this country is to remain democratic, the answer is not to take away those safety valves of trade union and local government rights or to put the cap on the safety valves that have existed for many generations, but to listen to the people and their representatives. Law and order is one thing, but often people use that phrase to cover up the repression taking place in many parts of the country.

Our people have a right to work, to have a say, to vote and to fight for jobs not only for themselves but for their children's future. In her speech, the Prime Minister again misled the House by saying that there had been generous offers to the miners. It is said that, as with the steel industry, alternative employment will obviously be found. There are places in the north of England where 20,000 or 50,000 steel jobs have been lost, yet not one brick has been laid in an effort to replace them. Misleading statements will appear in the media and some people will say, "Well, if that is the case, fair enough." But it is not fair enough. We have already heard about MacGregor's promises. The steel industry is now nothing short of a desert. That is why the miners and Labour-controlled local authorities are making a stand. That stand is based not on sheer political cussedness, but on a belief in, and a willingness to defend, the democracy, freedom and rights of our people.

8.51 pm

Mr. Mike Woodcock (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for having called me to speak so early in the session and for giving me the opportunity briefly to review the Gracious Speech in the light of my constituency's needs.

As one would expect, some of the proposals in the Gracious Speech address problems in my constituency but others do not. Indeed, some of our problems cannot be dealt with by legislation. However, the Gracious Speech addresses itself well to five particular needs. Much has been said about the problem of unemployment. Like many other constituencies, mine suffers badly from unemployment. We have very high unemployment, particularly among the young, with 40 per cent. of our unemployed people being under 25 years of age. Therefore, I welcome the commitment in the Gracious Speech to achieving better job opportunities. But I also believe that the unemployed could do more and that that would be better than their remaining in the dole queues. However, I stress that concern for unemployment must be top of the Government's list of priorities.

Like the rest of the country, my constituency faces many problems of law and order. There is increased violence and lawlessness, and a decreasing respect for the forces of law and order. I therefore welcome the proposal to establish a national prosecution service which is independent of the police force, and the commitment to reject violence and terrorism in all its forms. Like many other constituencies, we have problems that stem from basic inefficiencies in our nationalised industries. Of course I welcome the proposal to expose those industries to greater competition and, where appropriate, to return them to the private sector. We also need greater mobility of labour as, fortunately, several high technology industries have recently moved into the north- west. For far too long occupational pension schemes have been unfair to contributors and have served to tie employee to employer unnecessarily. I therefore greatly welcome the proposals concerning the portability of pensions, which will give members of occupational schemes a fairer deal and increase job mobility.

We also have problems with the protection of the environment. We have a large disused oil refinery which is a scar on the landscape. It was a victim of the world recession and it now lies derelict and unused. At the same time, significant threats to our green belt land stem from inappropriate planning proposals by the county council. It is nonsense that derelict industrial land should remain uncleared because of a lack of finance while people continue to rape what is left of our open countryside. I therefore welcome the commitment to legislate for the protection of the environment.

I welcome all those commitments in the Gracious Speech as they address themselves to real problems in my constituency and the country. But there are some needs which were not touched on and which I should like the Government to meet. First, I regret that in the Gracious Speech there is no firm commitment to re-establishing a strong manufacturing base in this country. Many manufacturing industries have suffered badly from the recession. Some have suffered necessarily and even desirably, because it removed the dead wood, increased efficiency and threw down a challenge to management once again to manage. It made our industries more able to compete in world markets.

But the new jobs needed cannot come solely from the growth in our service industries. Service industries cannot in the end service themselves, and unless we arrest the decline in the manufacturing industries, we shall pay a heavy price in future years.

Many of my constituents rely heavily on the oil industry for their livelihood. That industry has suffered badly from the recession. It is an energy-based industry which, unlike coal, has learned the lessons of economic reality. It has brought us the windfall benefits of North sea oil, but they must not be used to camouflage the effect of our basic manufacturing industries running down. Instead, they must be used to give those industries the opportunity to modernise, re-equip and so create the new jobs we so desperately need.

I also regret that in the Gracious Speech there is no commitment to legislate on the increasing drug abuse problem which is apparent in many of our towns and cities. It is taking tragic toll among many of our young. However, although I regret the fact that those two items were missing from the Gracious Speech, I trust that they will figure largely in the Government's policies during this Session.

There are problems that cannot be addressed by legislation. Earlier I said that many of my constituents work in the oil industry. Many also work in the docks, and many more work in a major motor vehicle manufacturing plant. In all those industries there have been severe and damaging strikes during the past 12 months. They have damaged their prospects, their ability to compete in world markets and the opportunities to create the new jobs that we need. All those strikes were unnecessary, and they all

stemmed from the unwillingness of some trade unionists to accept the basic principle that we cannot pay ourselves more than we earn.

Therefore, I welcome all the proposals in the Gracious Speech, but I call upon the Government to pay more attention to the needs of our manufacturing industries and to the drug abuse problems so apparent in our towns and cities. I call upon everyone who has a job not to destroy the opportunity for others to escape the miseries of the dole queue.

8.58 pm

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): Last evening I was nearing the end of a 23-hour flight from the Falklands, so I do not apologise for referring to the Falklands issue. I shall not rehearse the causes of the war or the issues which arose from it. It is essential to consider the present and to look to the future. Every effort must be made, no matter how difficult the going, to establish more normal relations with Argentina. It is one thing to call for a policeman in an emergency; it is another to base one's whole life and economy on the existence of the policeman at the door. No matter how long the temporary provisions for maintaining the Falklands are necessary, we must never accept the present policy of Fortress Falklands as permanent.

The number of service men whom we now have to divert to that area is placing a great strain on our commitment to the north Atlantic treaty. The Government should take service morale more seriously. Service men have to serve 8,000 miles from Britain. The Government should not have chosen to rearrange the local overseas allowance at a time when local prices are increasing as a result of Government policies. That does little for the morale of soldiers and airmen who might have to spend four months on the top of Mount Kent in the freezing cold and 100 mph winds.

The Government should reassess the Falklands allowance because it is being used as a means by which the Government escape their obligations. Some men are on their second or third tour to the Falklands. A senior warrant officer told me that if he had to do another tour he would sooner resign from the forces than add to the pressures on his family. Others said much the same.

The Government should pay the Falklands allowance after a certain number of days. The allowance should automatically be paid during the existing or any subsequent tour cumulatively. I am thinking of air traffic controllers and others who have to return regularly.

Men working at the radar station on Mount Kent cannot be replaced by their female colleagues. Some groups of men are under particular pressure because they are required to leave their families at regular intervals.

I should like an assurance on the future of the bluey —the air letter that service personnel are permitted to send to their families free of charge. The Government have not made it clear that that facility is to be safeguarded. Anyone who talks to soldiers in the Falklands will recognise that their morale depends largely on the ease with which they can communicate with their families via the mail.

I should also like an assurance that soldiers who are injured will be allowed free phone calls to their families. The present position is not clear. The Government have an obligation not only to the forces, but to the British taxpayer.

There is a lack of facilities in the hospitals in my constituency because of Government cuts. One of my constituents has gangrene in one foot and no pulse in his legs, but the hospital does not have the X-ray facilities to carry out the necessary operation. The man is too weak to be moved to another hospital. The position was made known to a Minister, in my presence, by the consultant concerned. I am tired of my constituents suffering from Government cuts in the Health Service when money for the Falklands is sloshed around like water in a bucket.

I cite as an example the road that has been built between the airport and Stanley at a cost of more than £6 million. After only some months, it has deteriorated to a dust bowl. Yet, when I visited the Falklands two years ago, the road that had survived the war was in far better condition than the road built with the aid of Government funds. Every member of that delegation, including Conservative Members, will confirm that. I want to know how that chaos occurred. What disciplinary action is being taken against those responsible—whether the designers, those who ordered the road or the firm that carried out its construction? What will the Government do to remedy what is, until the new airport is built, the key line of communication—both military and civilian—between Stanley and the existing airport?

The Government have given little thanks to those who made possible the Falklands victory. Gibraltar, which was mentioned in the Gracious Speech, is to close its dockyard; and 470 of the workers in my constituency who work at the royal ordnance factory in Chorley have received redundancy notices. Many of us believe that that was caused less by lack of orders than by the Government's intention to privatise the ROFs and dispense with many loyal workers whose services are needed by the nation rather more than the profits that may be reaped by the potential buyers.

The future of the Falklands must include persuading its young people to remain there. Before the war, young men and women left the Falklands in droves. Surely it is not our intention simply to argue about a piece of land. It is more important to ensure that we create conditions that will allow the young people to remain in the Falklands. The existing Government policy does not help that. The Government have shied away from the keynote in the Shackleton speech, which asked for the redistribution of land. People want the land, but they want it at a price that they can afford. That is the only way in which we can give the coming generation a stake in the Falklands.

It is noticeable that in key development roles and managerial positions the expatriate takes precedence over the Falklander. Incidentally, he is employed at a higher rate of pay than the Falklander.

The Falklanders allege—and I ask for clarification from the Minister—that, either by directive or unwritten agreement, they are not considered for work on the new airport. I ask for clarification, whatever the reason. I want to know whether Falklanders are employed there and the number who are employed. One swallow does not make a summer, not even in the nature reserve of the Falklands. If we wish the Falklands to be reinstated, as it were, the islanders must be able to make a contribution. We must ensure that we do not halt the development because we owe more allegiance to absentee landlords, such as Coalite, than to those who inhabit the islands. I think that

[Mr. David Young]

some clarification is necessary from the Government in view of the article that appeared in *The Times* just over a week ago.

The Falklanders, like ourselves, contribute to the Health Service. The drugs are drawn from the National Health Service, but, unlike us, they are not required to pay prescription charges. That is rather odd.

The House will be aware that about 250 men died in the Falklands conflict and that the Opposition have criticised many aspects of the Government's policy on the Falklands. I think that that criticism was right. It must be understood that those who died did not come exclusively from Conservative-controlled constituencies. Some of those killed came from Labour constituencies. They were our kith and kin. No party that is represented in this place has a monopoly of concern for those who died or were wounded or for their relations. It is our duty to ensure that their memorial is not one of nationalistic nostalgia. We should now be intent on creating a climate in which the Falklanders may determine their own future independent of external forces.

9.13 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I hope that the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Mr. Young) will forgive me if I do not take up his remarks on the Falklands, which he made at length, except to say that I welcome the commitment in the Gracious Speech to work towards more normal relations with Argentina. I shall direct myself first, and briefly, to the economy, and, secondly, to the Greater London council.

Naturally, I welcome the central commitment in the Gracious Speech to reduce inflation. A trading nation that competes in world markets demands no less than that.

In the debate on unemployment that took place last week—during which, unfortunately, I was not able to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker—it was said that a former Labour Prime Minister had commented that inflation was the mother and father of unemployment. That is true, but surely the godfather of unemployment is complacency.

In recent years unemployment has risen as high as 18 per cent. in my constituency. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I know that the Government are not complacent. The MSC schemes speak for that. However, politics is about avoiding appearing to be complacent as well as not being complacent. I hope that in the coming months we can learn a lesson following the re-election of President Reagan. I am speaking at 9.14 pm on 6 November and I assume that President Reagan is being re-elected. He is being re-elected because inflation has been reduced in the United States, growth has increased and unemployment has declined. He has done that not by raising taxes. If anything, he has cut taxes. He has achieved that remarkable feat—remarkable in terms of modern economies—by allowing freedom to businesses to invest and to borrow.

President Reagan has freed the market. Within the constraints of the public sector borrowing requirement we could allow more freedom, especially in transport and housing investment. Hundreds of people in my constituency in West and East Lindsey are queueing for home improvement grants. They are denied the opportunity to receive those grants, but I think that they should be given that opportunity.

If I have one criticism of the Government's economic policy it is that the Government have not been sufficiently flexible in their treatment of capital spending. The real reason for President Reagan's remarkable success has been the way in which free enterprise has been freed of its shackles and services, hitherto performed by central and local government, have been devolved to the free market. That is why I turn to the proposal to abolish the GLC.

If we were talking about restoring many of those services to the democracy of the free market, I would be rather more enthusiastic about the abolition of the GLC. It is said that the metropolitan county councils have powers and no friends and the GLC has no power and plenty of friends. The Conservative group on the GLC, of which I was a member for four years, seems to have few friends in the House. I want to take the opportunity to put forward some of the views that that Conservative group has been advancing in recent months.

There are certain difficulties relating to the abolition of the GLC that have not yet been answered by the Government. One difficulty is accountability. I think that in a difficult world most hon. Members have one star to follow—democracy. It is said that democracy is being retained, but it is indirect democracy. Is it right that a borough councillor, elected to look after dustbins, should be allowed to sit on a joint board and determine policy on main roads in London? That will be the effect of the legislation. I do not think that indirectly elected joint boards can ever match a democratically and directly elected GLC. That is the central difficulty facing those who wish to abolish it.

It is also said that the GLC has been left with so few powers that it is not worth keeping it. That begs the question: why has the GLC been left with so few powers? Why was the ambulance service taken from the GLC in the early 1970s? Why was housing devolved to the boroughs? A number of powers are left to the GLC, and no one denies that. A number of important powers must be run on a London-wide basis, and 32 warring boroughs with differing ideologies, such as in Bromley and Hackney, cannot perforce join together to perform those functions. That difficulty is facing the Government. All those powers cannot be devolved to the boroughs. The real powers currently held by the GLC will be given to Marsham street, and I do not think that that is desirable.

I have my worries about the abolition of the GLC. It is right that someone should echo the policies put forward by Conservative members of the GLC. They are not extremist policies or exaggerated thoughts. The group is simply saying, "London government needs reforming. We need a new strategic authority, but it must be directly elected". Be that as it may, I believe that the issue of the GLC will not figure largely on the broad canvas of the Government's record over five or 10 years. What will figure largely will be the Prime Minister's courage and determination, the instilling of new attitudes of realism among trade union members, new confidence in the economy and the strengthening of our armed forces against external aggression. That is what is really important about what the Government are doing. I wholeheartedly support the Government and Ministers in what they hope to achieve.

9.19 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): If the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh)

and other Conservative Back Benchers are sincere in what they have said about the Queen's Speech, I do not see how the Government can survive in the coming Session, because many Conservative Members have talked about unemployment and how it affects their constituencies and how it brings hardship to their constituents. Those Conservative Members have appealed to the Government to ensure that something is done about unemployment.

The Queen's Speech does not give a great deal of encouragement to the unemployed. There is nothing for the unemployed school leavers and unemployed 40 and 50 year-olds in the policies outlined. The promise to continue existing policies will do nothing for those who are suffering hardship and despair at the thought of having to face a further term with this Government without the hope of a job.

Since the Government came into office in 1979 they have increased unemployment by 2 million. There are now over 3·25 million people registered as unemployed. Of those, 369,000 have been unemployed for more than three years; 700,000 for two years and over 1 million for a year or more. There are 1 million 18 to 24-year-olds for whom the Government have made no provision for training or employment. That is the future outlined in the Queen's Speech. People are fighting for their jobs. Many know that if they lose their current job they may never work again.

The fight that is taking place at present in the mining communities is in defence of jobs. Yesterday morning, one of my constituents who was a member of the NUM and who was on strike was fatally injured while trying to secure some coal for his family from an outcrop. He was trying to defend his job, and, at the same time, provide for his family. It is regrettable that that kind of price has to be paid. I hope that there will be a speedy settlement of the mining dispute.

When the pound dipped below $1·30, the Chancellor said that there was no crisis. We had to remind him then that there was a crisis — the anxiety of parents and hopelessness of children and families being split and scattered as they searched for work.

The Government should start to renovate our blighted and decaying inner cities, invest in an energy conservation programme or undertake a programme of transport renewal. They should start to renovate our old and potentially dangerous sewerage systems. They could use the £10 billion annual revenue from North sea oil to sponsor the production and development of industry. We have heard that statement from the Conservative Benches more than once today. The Government should be strengthening the stability, hard work and inventiveness of the nation, not wearing the country down with policies of constant slump. There is nothing in the Gracious Speech to promote any of those things which have been called for by Members on both sides.

On the proposal to abolish the metropolitan county councils, as a Member for a west Yorkshire constituency, I remind the Government of the *Times* editorial of 1 August, which stated:

"Last autumn's White Paper was one of Whitehall's shoddier products. A convincing case for abolition has yet to be made with intellectual rigour and sufficient fact . . . Ministers . . . seem to believe that in this matter assertion can be substituted for argument".

The Government have failed to demonstrate that realistic and practical arrangements are being made to secure an effective transfer of functions and have laid the blame for that failure upon the metropolitan county councils for their alleged failure to co-operate.

I do not accept that argument. Indeed, the Secretary of State for the Environment himself stated in a letter on 31 July to the leaders of the six metropolitan county councils that the principle of abolition had not yet been settled. The metropolitan county councils are expected to co-operate in implementing a change which has not been considered, let alone approved, by the House. Moreover, they are expected to provide a smooth transfer of services to bodies which, even when they have been identified as the eventual recipients of those functions, are either not yet in existence or are not structured to receive those functions.

The metropolitan county councils are expected to co-operate in the transfer of functions in a climate in which the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act and a variety of additional controls have added extra responsibilities and in which the councils still have a statutory obligation to deliver services. The metropolitan county councils, the district councils and the as yet unconstituted joint boards are expected to achieve an efficient handover of functions with an aggregate expenditure of more than £1·5 billion in a matter of months — a shorter time scale than that already needed to formulate proposals for the main abolition legislation. That is the background against which we must consider the recommendation in the Queen's Speech.

Civil servants are already on record as saying that in the transfer of the waste disposal function

"there are no real precedents to build on and therefore all parties are to some extent feeling their way".

That was reported on page 1290 of the *Municipal Journal* of 17 August. We believe that that statement can be applied more generally. The responsibility is upon the Government, as the instigator of change, to demonstrate that arrangements are firmly under control. All the evidence suggests that they are not. In such a situation the claims made in the Queen's Speech about the introduction of legislation to abolish the metropolitan councils are premature. That part of the Queen's Speech should be reconsidered with a view to withdrawing it and ensuring that the situation is properly examined before any legislation is introduced.

9.29 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien). I agree with him that the Government can help our economic recovery by embarking on a selective programme of capital expenditure. That would be especially helpful to the construction industry, where more than 400,000 people are unemployed. I estimate—I am supported by considerable evidence from eminent sources — that the Government would claw back by PAYE, national insurance, additional competitiveness and an improved infrastructure more than 65 per cent. of any expenditure undertaken. Therefore, I too request the Government to give attention to capital spending. I draw a distinct difference between capital and revenue spending, which unfortunately the Chancellor of the Exchequer fails to understand. I come from a background of smaller business, and I have spent about 14 years in the construction industry.

I welcome what is clearly a fairly modest Gracious Speech. All hon. Members will warmly welcome some of

[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]

its proposals. The proposal for reform of the insolvency laws is especially welcome. Many hon. Members will have received correspondence from constituents, experts in that area or people who have been affected by insolvency and will know that the laws are out of date and require urgent reform.

As a member of the Select Committee on Social Services, I warmly welcome the Government's intention to introduce a Bill to improve occupational pension rights for people who leave schemes before pensionable age, and to ensure that people can obtain information about their schemes. The Select Committee recommended that in a report, and I am delighted that the Bill will be introduced.

I wish to talk mainly about employment, but first I wish to refer to the Government's intention to continue to work for a settlement in Namibia. It is a disputed territory, hitherto known as South West Africa, where many of us hope to see independence. However, we want independence by evolution, which will improve the standard of life of all the peoples of that country, and not independence imported by a one-off election of a Marxist dictatorship which would destroy the standard of life there and create the poverty and deprivation which, sadly, have often been the order of the day after independence has been granted to countries in Africa and elsewhere.

I hope that the Government will pay maximum attention to Namibia's internal political parties, whoever and whatever they may be. Many of them have risked their lives by returning to Namibia. It has 11 different ethnic groups, which speak 16 different languages, they all have different traditions and cultures, and Namibia is four times the size of the United Kingdom. I believe that Namibia can set the pace for further social and political development in South Africa itself.

Therefore, I hope that the United Kingdom, which so far has not supported the South West Africa People's Organisation as the sole and authentic voice there, will act as an honest broker and in a positive and constructive way seek to understand the problems there. In that way Namibia can be brought in due course to a peaceful independence, which will lead to further progress in South Africa. The Government have a great part to play in Africa, and I hope that they will play it with responsibility and with the knowledge of the internal parties of Namibia who wish to have peace.

The Gracious Speech states:

"my Government remains deeply concerned about unemployment and will continue policies designed to achieve better opportunities for employment."

I wish to refer specifically to the textile and clothing industry, about which I feel strongly. I have spoken in the House many times about this industry, and I shall continue to do so. On occasion I have voted against my own party because of my commitment to it.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): What about the dairy farmers?

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), who has just come into the Chamber.

Mr. Budgen: I have been in for some time.

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful for that.

I feel fervently about this industry and those who work in it. They are loyal and skilled workers who have shown responsibility. It is just a pity that similar responsibility has not been shown by other workers, particularly those who are currently on strike in the coal industry. Those employed in the textile and clothing industry are not as highly paid, and do not work as short a week as the miners, nor have they ever been offered such generous redundancy and severance pay.

The textile industry is one of the largest manufacturing sectors in Britain, with sales in 1984 likely to exceed £7 billion, an added value of £2·5 billion, and 287,000 employees. If the clothing sector is taken into account, the industry employs 500,000 people. As many hon. Members know, it is highly concentrated in certain regions, and is particularly important to the north-west. I have the honour to represent the constituency of Macclesfield in that region. The industry is also important to west Yorkshire, the east midlands, Scotland and Northern Ireland and to many areas where unemployment is very high.

If the Government are sincere about wanting to do something about unemployment, and to pursue policies to achieve better opportunities for employment, I urge them to renew the multi-fibre arrangement, which is due for renewal and negotiation in July 1986. However, negotiations are already beginning.

Mr. Walter Harrison (Wakefield): Will the hon. Gentleman vote for it?

Mr. Winterton: I shall most certainly vote for a renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement or any other such arrangement which brings about orderly marketing in clothing and textiles, not only in the United Kingdom but in Europe as well. I do not want to return to the period 1980-82 when output in the textile industry fell by 30 per cent. and 170,000 jobs were lost. That is virtually the total in the mining industry today, yet the textile industry did not strike. It did not do so for many reasons. It was aware of international competition and the problems that the country faced. The work force and the management worked together to try to ensure the survival of that industry, and I believe that they have done so.

I want an assurance that the Government will renegotiate a successor to the current multi-fibre arrangement. I know that the initial moves have already been made. There has been a GATT study, but so far the report has only been factual. I want an assurance from the Government that the textile and clothing industry is still a special case in world trade. I want them to recognise that, far from being over-protectionist, the multi-fibre arrangement has allowed EEC imports to continue growing even when the market for such goods within the EEC and the United Kingdom has been declining.

I want the Government to realise that, even taking account of the MFA, the EEC, including the United Kingdom, is far more open than other markets to imports from other countries producing textiles, such as iron curtain countries, the United States, and the developing countries. If the Government abandon the MFA, there will be complete chaos, which could be harmful to the world trading system and damaging to the less developed countries.

The MFA has been of great benefit to many countries, both developed and underdeveloped. It has ensured orderly marketing in textiles and clothing. If we are concerned about unemployment, we should pay attention to the textile and clothing industry, which makes a major

contribution to our exports and which provides massive employment. No longer is this industry one that provides employment in the "dark Satanic mills" of Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It is a highly geared, modern industry that has made investments almost second to none in the United Kingdom. It has high technology computers and has made improvements in design. This industry deserves the Government's support.

I put a question to my hon. Friend the Minister, which I hope will be answered later in the debate on the Gracious Speech. Are the Government committed to a renewal of the MFA, to safeguard an industry that has made a great contribution to our country and will continue to do so if given the opportunity?

9.42 pm

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) is one of the few Conservative voices that speak for manufacturing interests, and I share his view that there is a great need for manufacturing industries to play a continuing role within the United Kingdom economy. Many of his ministerial friends feel that we should be blinded by high technology, to the exclusion of some of the traditional manufacturing industries.

Thursday's Cabinet meeting, when decisions will be taken on public expenditure, has a far greater significance than much of the legislative programme outlined in the Gracious Speech. No doubt the choice will be in favour of cutting taxation, in preference to a reduction in the number of unemployed. It remains to be seen just how the Government propose to introduce their suggested tax reform. I question whether it will do much to assist the low paid. The evidence from the two Chancellors that we have had under this Government shows that the Government's tax reforms have done little to assist those on low pay. They abolished the lower rate of income tax, much to the detriment of those at the lower end of the scale. We are told that the tax cuts will be made to fulfil a manifesto pledge, but there was no manifesto pledge about the doubling of unemployment and 3,300,000 people on the dole. I hope that the Government realise that they have a duty to tackle that problem seriously.

Several of my hon. Friends have spoken about the construction industry. There is no mention in the Gracious Speech of additional resources for new building, for specialised needs such as sheltered housing, or for repairs and modernisation. All of those could create employment and, to that extent, reduce public expenditure.

In the context of the unhappy situation in Cyprus, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) spoke of an island divided. Britain is also becoming an island divided, because a lot depends on the part of the island in which a person happens to live whether he or she benefits from existing Government policies. It oftens seems to me that Ministers are more concerned with the mortgage interest rate than with the level of unemployment. That is what seems to matter most to them—no doubt because in the main they represent those parts of the country which benefit from the existing arrangements for open-ended tax relief, and at the same time it looks as though the Chancellor of the Exchequer will do another penny-pinching exercise on the housing benefits legislation.

In the Gracious Speech we see a reference to the introduction of a transport Bill and the deregulation of buses. I hope that some of our rural areas will wake up to the implications of the ending of cross-subsidisation which will have a major impact on the availability of bus services in many country areas, quite apart from the difficulties that will be created in some of our inner city areas and housing schemes where, although bus routes are not always profitable, they are socially necessary.

I am sorry that the Government have chosen to introduce a Bill which will include Scotland. I deprecate their approach in trying to wrap up Scottish legislation in United Kingdom Bills on matters where the time-honoured recognition of the differences in practice and administration have made Scottish Bills more appropriate.

The several Scottish legal measures which are to be introduced will be important to both personal and family life. In the main, though, the proposals in the Gracious Speech will do very little for Scotland in the face of rising unemployment and greater impoverishment in many families. The Government fail to recognise that it is impossible to divorce economic factors from their social implications. Greater recognition is needed of the gravity of social problems which arise because of the unfairness of the way in which unemployment is hitting parts of the country.

Time and time again today we have heard references to the 1944 White Paper on employment. But this Government have run up the white flag whenever they have contemplated combating unemployment. Ministers appear to be resiling from their responsibility to organise and manage the economy in such a way that we can start moving back to a higher level of employment.

In this context the Prime Minister spoke of tomorrow's world. Under this Government today's world is disturbing enough. The bleak offerings in the Gracious Speech offer precious little hope that tomorrow's world will be a pleasant prospect. It might be a pleasant prospect for those who are lucky enough to get on to "Mrs. Thatcher's ark". The Prime Minister made a subtle remark this afternoon which gave the impression that it is all right for those who are high and dry, such as her friends and some of the pigmy minds that she has surrounding her at present; but it is wise to remember what happened to the ones that did not get on to the ark. Unfortunately, that is the kind of situation that we have in Britain at present. It is more distressing for the great majority than it is for the select few who are being well looked after by this Government.

9.50 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): The summer recess is a useful time for hon. Members. Not only does it allow the Liberal and Social Democratic Members—who I note are not here tonight—to recover from those long nights which they made us endure. It also, much more importantly, allows hon. Members to travel abroad to see for themselves what is going on, to determine how that will affect us and to decide what we need to do.

I am grateful to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association for assisting my travel to St. Helena. For those who are interested in that isolated island, the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and I have produced a report with several recommendations which has been deposited in the Library. But I want to deal with another isolated place, because, by necessity, from St. Helena, we had to

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travel down to South Africa. That state is isolated, not by distance, but by its own unfair regime; a regime that is ostracised for what it has done and what it continues to do.

I follow my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) in talking about South Africa because I believe that the changes that are happening there should mean that the Government must encourage and hasten the constitutional changes. They will have to do so quickly, otherwise the opportunity will be lost.

The last time that I went to South Africa I was in the Royal Navy. It was 16 years ago, and since that time there have been many changes. Probably the most profound has been a fairly recent change — the acceptance of the urban black. There is also, and evidently, less petty apartheid, and on 3 September there was the inception of a new constitution. Many may suggest that that new constitution is a democratic mirage. Undoubtedly it had poor support—only 18 per cent. of the coloureds and 30 per cent. of the Indian population voted. Even more importantly, it is a mirage because it is incomplete. That is the most polite term that one could use. It ignores the majority of the population—the blacks. It is a mirage for another reason. Whatever it says, it continues to reinforce power in the hands of the white minority.

But even that constitution, providing that it is amended and added to, can provide the basis for a more equitable society which will provide greater opportunity for all. Despite amendment and addition, the constitution will be no more than an imperfect and medium-term solution, but it is better than what there was and it is better than what there is. Those in South Africa who expect an immediate move to one man, one vote in one Parliament delude themselves. They do so because the whites have the power. They have economic, military, police and parliamentary power. There is no price that many of them will not pay to retain that power.

There will be no change imposed by external aggression. South Africa is much more secure from that by virtue of its foreign policy accords with its northern neighbours. There will be no change through urban violence—a violence born of desperation and the denial of hope. The whites have the power to stop, or at least to contain, urban violence. Those who believe that there will be disinvestment by the West delude themselves. We have £9 billion of investment in South Africa, two-way trade of £9 billion per annum and 1 million Britons living in South Africa. We shall not cut off our nose to spite our face.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my hon. Friend accept that many sensible, rational and patriotic black South Africans do not want the West to disinvest in that country? Does he also accept that many of the problems in South Africa are not between whites and blacks, coloureds or Asians, but between the different tribal groupings of black and black and even Asians and blacks?

Mr. Sayeed: My hon. Friend has made two good points. I have spoken to people who are UDF members and whom I believe are still supporters of the African National Congress, and they do not want to see disinvestment, because they know that the people who will be hurt the most are those whom we need to assist the most.

The way forward is for our Government to encourage people to accept the facts, however unpalatable, and to encourage the South African Government also to accept the facts, including the fact that unless the Coloured and Asian Houses within the constitution are seen to achieve real change within one or two years, they will lose the little credibility that they have.

What must the white South African Government allow the new constitution to achieve? The first achievement must be the abolition of the Group Areas Act. Everyone expects the end of the Mixed Marriages Act in the near future, and I cannot see how it will be possible to sustain the Group Areas Act once the Mixed Marriages Act has been abolished.

Secondly, apartheid must be eradicated; that is beginning to happen. Thirdly, the pass laws must end. Those who say that that would cause a massive influx forget that the pass laws were suspended after Sharpeville and there was no large influx. Fourthly, we must see the end of the monstrous policy of detention without trial, with the freeing of those acknowledged leaders of the black, coloured and Asian communities who have forsworn violence. Fifthly, there needs to be more education for blacks. Finally, and most important, there must be a Black House within the constitution.

None of those actions would remove the white veto system provided by the new consensus system. That should reassure the whites who are frightened of black power and whose fear is reinforced by what has happened in Zimbabwe. However, it must be understood that these actions are the minimum necessary to persuade the majority of the population — blacks, Asians and coloureds—that South Africa is their country, or urban violence will continue to grow.

Inequality and discrimination exist throughout the world. In black Africa, they tend to be murderous and tribal. In South America, they tend to be murderous and dictatorial. In Russia, there is an oppressive police state. But only in South Africa are discrimination and oppression the law. It is a law based on colour and not worth. It is a monstrous denial of basic freedoms, but it will not be changed in one fell swoop. It needs to be changed one step at a time.

Those changes in the new constitution must take place if the constitution is to have any chance of succeeding. Accordingly, I urge them on the Government. This Government are very powerful when it comes to persuading South Africa, as we have massive trade links with that country. It is in the Government's interest to persuade the South Africans to produce a more decent and equitable society and to assist South Africa to join the international community once more. If it does not do these things and we continue to ask for one man, one vote in one Parliament we shall not get anything but violence. A new amended constitution offers an opportunity. The Government must grasp it.

Debate adjourned.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Roads (Norfolk)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

10 pm

Mr. Richard Ryder (Mid-Norfolk): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for being present to answer the debate. Her wide knowledge of Norfolk's special road problems has impressed all of us who represent the county's constituencies. By the end of the debate I hope that she will be left in no doubt about the sense of grievance felt by Norfolk people over the quality of our major trunk roads. I hope, too, that she will be left in no doubt about our resolve to secure a fairer deal for the country in future.

The myth applied to Norfolk is of a county of people living an insular existence who resent the intrusion of trade and are content with their deficient road links with the remainder of Britain. But the myth is a far cry from the reality. The reality of Norfolk is of a county whose population is growing about 20 times faster than the average of other British counties and whose prosperity overwhelmingly depends upon its industry and commerce.

Successive Governments have swallowed the romantic myth but ignored the harder reality. Now we ask the Government to signal a change of emphasis and a recognition that Norfolk's industrial and commercial concerns require better trunk roads to link them with suppliers and customers in the midlands and the south.

Norfolk is practically the only county in England not to be joined by high quality road communications—by which I mean dual carriageways—to the main motorway network. Alas, the picture will not be drastically altered when the current road programme, to which I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister will refer, has been finished.

I shall give a few details of Norfolk's appalling problem. The distance from Great Yarmouth to the Newmarket bypass down the A11 is 70 miles; from Norwich it is 45 miles. Even after the completion of the Attleborough bypass, only four miles will be dual carriageway.

The picture is just as miserable on the east-west roads through the county. The distance from Great Yarmouth to the A1 at Newark, a vital freight route, is about 128 miles, of which 74 are in Norfolk and only seven are dual carriageway.

The trunk road improvement programme, welcome though it is, has come too late in the day and merely scratches the surface of the problem. The county will be permanently disadvantaged as a result. For example, dismay has been expressed that the Attleborough bypass is being built mostly as a single carriageway, and that the Thetford bypass will be, too.

The robust campaign of the *Eastern Daily Press* has highlighted the anger felt throughout Norfolk about the inadequacies of our major trunk roads. It worries me that the anger has been voiced most strongly by enterprising business men who are trying to create extra jobs for Norfolk people. Yet that anger does not surprise me. The largest town in my constituency is East Dereham, the centre of Norfolk. Its unemployment rate is higher than the national average. During the past two months I have visited several factories in the town, and everywhere I have heard the same complaints about the poor major trunk roads which hamper the growth of many of these firms. Recently, I have been pleading with small business men and entrepreneurs from outside the county to start up in Dereham. Their replies invariably take similar forms. They acknowledge that Norfolk councils do their best to keep industrial costs down; they acknowledge the reliability of Norfolk's work force; and they acknowledge that Norfolk offers numerous attractions. Then comes the inevitable "but". They regret that the poor quality of Norfolk's road communications with other parts of Britain would prevent them from bringing in raw materials and moving finished products out speedily. They then contrast Norfolk's roads with the roads in neighbouring Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

Road programmes in those two counties have received higher priority than in Norfolk. Dual carriageways link the two counties direct with the south and the midlands and with the continent via Felixstowe. People's reliance on dual carriageways in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire is a matter not of personal convenience, but of economic necessity. Why should Governments have regarded Norfolk as different?

Whether we like it or not, Norfolk's future industrial and commercial success will depend heavily upon the ability of cars and lorries to transport people and goods quickly from office to office and factory gate to factory gate along dual carriageways—which do not exist.

Perhaps the Minister of State will think that I am calling for an increase in public expenditure. That is not so. I am calling for the Department of Transport's resources to be allocated more equitably. Dual carriageways have been lavished on other counties. I make no complaint about that, but I do complain that many of those counties are still receiving better deals than Norfolk.

The efforts over many years of my hon. Friends the Members for Norfolk, South-West (Sir P. Hawkins), for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) and for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) have achieved some results, especially with bypasses. I pay tribute to their hard work. Norfolk needs more than bypasses. It needs a modern road network to take account of its growing population and emergence as an industrial and commercial county of the top rank.

I have deliberately kept my speech brief so that my hon. Friends can contribute. All my hon. Friends representing Norfolk constituencies are united in their desire to convince the Department that Norfolk has been overlooked.

I emphasise that I shall strain every political muscle as long as I am in Parliament to try to ensure that Norfolk gets a fairer deal from Governments. I shall do my best to ensure in Whitehall that the myth of Norfolk's rural insularity is replaced with an appreciation of the reality of its commercial existence upon which its future prosperity rests. Lasting prosperity can be secured by improving road links with the remainder of Britain.

10.7 pm

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder) for allowing me the opportunity to add my weight to his remarks. I endorse everything that he said about improvements to the road network in Norfolk. I have the honour to represent Norwich, South which, despite its name, covers three quarters of the fine city of Norwich.

Norwich should not be isolated from the rest of the country, but isolated it often seems to be because of the lack of good road communications with the rest of the

[Mr. John Powley]

country. We spend many hours in our constituencies visiting industrial and commercial establishments. Only yesterday I visited Diamond H. Controls Ltd. in the constituency represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson). Many of its employees live in my constituency. I taxed the managing director and his associates about their problems. They stressed the difficulty of getting goods in and out of their factory. Ninety per cent. of the output from that factory is transported by road, either south down the A11 or west along the A47 or A17 to the midlands. That firm tells me, and I have no reason to disbelieve it, that it needs to compete keenly in both home and world markets for the business available. It needs good, efficient, road communications to keep its transportation costs to a minimum so that it can compete efficiently. It produces the right goods at the right price, but it needs to transport them speedily to its customers. It cannot ensure efficient delivery in current circumstances.

One of the largest shoe manufacturers in Norwich—which has seen the demise of that industry—is Bally, which is a world-renowned manufacturer. We are proud of that company. It says that 100 per cent. of its output is transported by road, and it faces similar problems to those that I have already cited. Its drivers are held up because of the lack of good road communications.

The chamber of commerce in my constituency has time and again told me that its members must have better road communications to ensure that their goods are transported efficiently.

We are grateful for the Attleborough bypass. However, I have it on good authority that the lobbying for that bypass, which is due for completion next year, began 16 years ago. That is far too long. I hope that I shall be in this House in 16 years, but I also hope that I shall not then be lobbying for improvements to the A11. I hope that the efforts of myself and my hon. Friends will have borne fruit well before then.

I, like my hon. Friends, do not seek greater public expenditure. However, Norfolk has long been the forgotten arm of Britain in the share of resources. When rate support grants have been discussed in the House I have asked for a better share of the available resources for Norfolk. I support the efforts of my hon. Friends to obtain a greater share of the country's resources to be spent on improving road communications, that will provide safety and better employment prospects for those in my constituency and the constituencies of my hon. Friends.

10.13 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder) for allowing me to intervene briefly in the debate. He was right to mention Norfolk's strong industrial base, and also right to talk about the sense of grievance. It needs a far better infrastructure.

King's Lynn is part of that strong industrial base, but it suffered a grievous blow last Friday when GKN Pistons Ltd. announced the closure of its plant with the loss of 143 jobs. We must treble our efforts to attract more firms to that part of Norfolk.

Every time we try to attract new firms, they ask about communications—and, above all, that crucial link with the north and the midlands, the A17 and A47. We need more bypasses and dualling on that route. Likewise, the other main artery into King's Lynn is the A10, but the last stretch of that road is woefully inadequate. There is a desperate need for a bypass around West Winch and Setchey.

Finally, I make two specific pleas to my hon. Friend the Minister of State which I have made to her previously. First, the two roundabouts on the southern King's Lynn bypass have foundations for flyovers. If my hon. Friend had been in my constituency last summer she would have seen huge queues extending for many miles. There is a desperate need for the flyovers to be built now and I urge her not to waste any more time in building them.

My second plea—I have corresponded with my hon. Friend on this issue previously—is that my hon. Friend should recognise the lack of safety on the eastern bypass round King's Lynn. It is a three-lane bypass with a poor safety record. I urge her to consider carefully the possibility of alternate double white lining on that stretch of road.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk in urging a fairer deal for Norfolk's communications, upon which the community and the county survives. Like my hon. Friend, I do not ask for more money.

10.15 pm

Mr. Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): I join my hon. Friends in expressing gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder) for initiating the debate. It is essential that Norfolk should have a dual road to Norwich. The A11 is one of the most dangerous roads in the county. All the figures in the world will not reveal the facts. The A11 is avoided because it is so dangerous, slow and frustrating. It is high time that Norfolk received its fair share of Government expenditure. However, like my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk, I am not asking for any extra expenditure from the Department of Transport. My hon. Friends and I are saying that Norfolk should receive the benefit of some modest expenditure, which would provide us with one dual road into the centre of the county at least.

10.16 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder) on securing the debate. I am grateful to him for raising the issue because it provides an opportunity for me to hear again his views and those of his hon. Friends on the problems of Norfolk's roads. As I have said, this is not the first time that I have heard about them. I am well aware of the problems.

Norfolk Members have been assiduous for years in chasing up successive Ministers to increase the expenditure on the roads in the county. The work of my hon. Friends the Members for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), who is now the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, for Norfolk, South-West (Sir P. Hawkins) and for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) and more recently that of my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Norfolk and for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) is now coming to fruition. I ask them to remember that by the end of the 1980s we shall have spent £159 million on 28 trunk road schemes to the benefit

of Norfolk. The hard work of my hon. Friends over some years is coming to fruition, but I, like them, am impatient to see results.

I am acutely aware of the growing frustration of the many interests which believe that substantial expenditure on Norfolk's trunk roads and links is long overdue and that economic activity is suffering as a result. Perhaps they see Norfolk as a poor relation when it comes to investment in new and improved roads. The contents of my postbag over the past few months and the vigorous campaign by the local media leave me in no doubt about feelings within the county.

I hope that I can reassure my hon. Friends that the Department does not regard Norfolk as a poor relation. On the contrary, it is a most important county. There has been a rapid growth in trade with Europe, and this market accounts for 43 per cent. of our exports. This has brought about a dramatic growth of traffic through the east coast ports. That is one of the factors that has led to a significant growth in road traffic in all the eastern counties over the past decade when compared with the rates of growth in the rest of England.

In the 1970s my predecessors made a conscious decision to concentrate resources on improving the A12 and A45 routes to provide high standard links from the Midlands and the London area to the rapidly developing ports of Harwich and Felixstowe and on building the M11 between London and Cambridge. That work is virtually complete, but the programme has meant that until a few years ago the roads further north in Norfolk did not have quite the same priority. Now they do.

Norfolk MPs have been active in ensuring that many useful improvements have been completed. Many are in progress, and many more are to come. The changes in the developments taking place in the county, particularly at Great Yarmouth, are notable. Twice this year I have travelled right up the A11 to see for myself the state of the road. In August, I saw the rapidly developing port at Great Yarmouth and how it is expanding its facilities for the rapid and efficient movement of goods to and from Europe.

I recognise the substantial growth in activity of the offshore oil and gas industries and the way in which they are bringing in extra traffic, especially lorries and tankers, to the A47, the A11 and the A17. All those developments, together with others at Lowestoft and King's Lynn as well as in the regional capital at Norwich, reinforce what my hon. Friends have asked for—good communications to allow healthy and efficient growth to take place. We recognise the crucial role that good roads play.

Although previous Administrations gave priority to Felixstowe and Harwich, in 1980 we accepted, with a special mention in the White Paper, Cmnd. 7908, at paragraph 154, the local view that particular importance should be attached to the route from Newmarket to Norwich and onwards to Great Yarmouth That meant giving high priority to improvements on the A11, A17 and A47 trunk road routes in the county.

We have maintained our trunk road commitment, despite the difficult economic climate since 1980. In that climate, while all public spending has been rigorously scrutinised, we have managed to sustain the momentum of the road programme. This year, in England as a whole, we plan to spend £805 million on trunk roads—an increase of about 13 per cent. in real terms over spending in 1983-84. Even so, there remain more claims on spending than resources to meet them, and I must look carefully at proposals for additional work in earlier years than planned in the programme. I accept that none of my hon. Friends has asked for extra resources, but I think they know that to advance certain roads in the programme could increase the annual expenditure beyond the limits to which I am able to go.

I acknowledge that much still needs to be done, but the present programme provides for the construction of 28 schemes by the end of the 1980s, with a total value at 1982 prices of £159 million. All those improvements will be of direct benefit to Norfolk. Results are already being seen, with bypasses open on the A17 west of King's Lynn, on the A47 at Wisbech, King's Lynn, Swaffham, East Dereham and Blofield, and that progress is being maintained. On the A11, the Attleborough bypass is under construction, and I am glad to report that it should be ready in the spring, in advance of the planned date. A public inquiry into the Wymondham-Cringleford improvement started today, and the Thetford bypass inquiry should start next March.

On the A17 in Lincolnshire, which is important to Norfolk, the Swineshead bypass is under construction, and draft orders for two further schemes are to be published soon. On the A47, the northern section of the Great Yarmouth bypass including a new lifting bridge over Breydon Water is under construction. The Wisbech and West Walton bypass was opened to traffic earlier this year. The preparation of draft orders for the Norwich southern bypass is well in hand.

I know that, despite the progress we have made, hon. Members are concerned that we are not providing as much dual carriageway as they would like, especialy on the A11. I have received many letters questioning in particular the single carriageway standard proposed for the Thetford bypass and expressing the view that it should be built as a dual carriageway. Some have said that the whole of the A11 should be improved to dual carriageway standard.

I realise that this is seen by many as a critical factor in the ability of Norfolk's industry and commerce to compete effectively. New roads are, however, expensive. They use up land—often good agricultural land—and I must be certain that they do not absorb more in resources than is strictly justified. They must provide a good return on investment. I am sure that my hon. Friends would not wish it to be otherwise.

The standard adopted for the improvement of any particular stretch of road, new road or bypass depends on a number of factors. The expected volume of traffic on that stretch of road is obviously the most influential. I must be clear about one point, however. We do not provide a particular standard of road because the road has a particular status or because the road happens to be a trunk road. We try to meet the likely need rather than provide uniformity. That is common sense. It means that we take into account the comings and goings, as it were, of traffic on those roads because not all stretches of the A11, A17 or A47 are trafficked to the same degree. We are trying to provide the road to meet the need, rather than uniformity.

My hon. Friends will also understand why it is crucial to avoid over-provision. To build a road to a standard higher than is necessary to carry predicted traffic flows efficiently and in safety has one immediate effect. That

[Mrs. Lynda Chalker]

effect is to deprive other hard-pressed communities of any form of relief from through traffic, because the resources will not be there.

I have to consider Norfolk, in particular, tonight and over the next few years, but I cannot forget other areas of the country which need their bypasses or on-line improvements. Some of these have worse accident records than the roads that have been mentioned tonight. I say that because every accident is one that we wish that we had not had. There are some pretty bad black spots around the country with which we have to deal. I am glad to say that they are not all in Norfolk.

Our current programme for the A11 will make a material difference to the quality of that route. The programme includes some 15 miles of dual carriageway programmed for completion in the next few years — mostly between Attleborough and Norwich, where a substantial volume of local traffic joins more distant traffic so increasing traffic figures significantly, but also from Barton Mills in Suffolk southward towards Newmarket. At Thetford each White Paper since 1980 has quite clearly signalled our intention to build a single carriageway bypass. That is because the traffic volume we expect on that stretch of the A11 will not reach the level which would justify consideration of duals. The shortfall is not marginal; it is significant. But what we do propose is to provide a crawler lane south and northbound for traffic approaching the junction with the A134. That tackles one of the main problems along the bypass.

In addition to all that we are trying to do on trunk roads for Norfolk, I am conscious of the role that local roads play. That is why the Government have supported the county council's efforts to improve its major roads, to bypass towns like Stoke Ferry and Fakenham, and improvements in urban roads such as those in Norwich, King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth. Over the past five years we have accepted £28 million of capital expenditure for transport supplementary grant. This year, 1984-85, it reached 93 per cent. of Norfolk's bid. It is certainly improving.

I note that some of the large new road schemes have been postponed by Norfolk county council in the past year. Any postponement has a long-term effect, but I hope that in the years ahead it will be able to get on with its roads.

I am glad to see that in its 1985-86 transport policies and programmes the council shows itself able to start the Downham Market bypass, delayed from 1983-84, and the Fakenham bypass, delayed from 1984-85, and that two A143 bypasses are lined up for 1986-87.

I entirely recognise the concern felt about the adequacy of the A11 and other roads. I am struck by the helpful debate tonight. We have two questions to answer. The first is whether local factors greatly increase the expected volume of traffic. The second relates to the concern expressed about frustration.

May I give the House a pledge? As part of my general duty to keep the adequacy of the trunk road network under review, I shall be looking at those stretches of the A11 currently without schemes in the trunk road programme to see how remaining problems may be tackled and, in particular, whether there is a case for a limited length of dual carriageway which might prevent a build-up of long platoons of slow-moving traffic.

My hon. Friends will understand that I must be careful not to raise false hopes, but I can assure them that I shall do my best to ensure that all Norfolk's roads are decent and adequate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 7 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LOCHABER WATER POWER ORDER CONFIRMATION

Mr. Secretary Younger presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to Lochaber Water Power: and the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered upon Tuesday next and to be printed. [Bill 3].

HMS Conqueror (Log Book)

2.35 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli) *(by private notice)* asked the Secretary of State for Defence what has happened to the log book of HMS Conqueror.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Heseltine): During the Falklands campaign, HMS Conqueror kept an account containing detailed operational information which was used to compile the submarine's formal report of proceedings. This is a classified document and is in the possession of the Ministry of Defence.

The submarine's navigating officer also kept a "control room log" which records the latitude and longitude, distance run, course, speed and depth of the submarine at hourly intervals together with other routine readings. This document contains no tactical information. It has been mislaid and as it, too, is classified, a board of inquiry is being held.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for answering the question. His astonishing admission that he, his Department and the Navy, apparently, have lost—some unkind souls might say conveniently lost — the navigation log book not of some cross-channel ferry but of HMS Conqueror, is another extraordinary episode in the Government's pathetic attempts to explain away all the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the General Belgrano.

Will the Secretary of State agree that there are only two explanations of what has happened to the log book? The first is that it has been lost through gross incompetence on the part of the Navy, but very few people believe that the Navy loses log books of that kind. The second is that it has been stolen — and may have been destroyed — by someone who thinks that details contained in the log book are embarrassing not only to Her Majesty's Government but to the Prime Minister personally.

Is it not a fact that this highly classified document would contain all the details of the movements not only of Conqueror but possibly of the Belgrano as well, on 30 April, when the rules of engagement were changed; on 1 May, when, we are now told—although we were not told originally—Conqueror spotted the Belgrano; and on 2 May, when the Belgrano was sunk. Would not the log book — the Secretary of State tries to downgrade its importance — have contained all the details of the movements of those two ships, certainly for those three days?

Will the Secretary of State and the Government at last come clean, treat this House with some respect, and give us a full clear, honest and truthful account of all the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the sinking of the Belgrano?

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Member will realise that, once an inquiry is set up within the Ministry of Defence, it is incumbent on us to find out what the inquiry reveals before reaching judgments about it in advance.

The right hon. Member makes a more serious allegation in which he invites me to come clean about the sinking of the Belgrano. Unhesitatingly I do it. The decision was taken in order to protect British lives. *[Interruption.]* The House and the country are sick and tired of the way—

[Mr. Heseltine]

[Interruption.]—that Opposition Members, for narrow and inexplicable reasons, pursue a campaign against British national interests.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I agree that the loss of any classified document is a serious matter and worthy of an inquiry, but does not my right hon. Friend agree that the sinking of the Belgrano by HMS Conqueror in effect put the Argentine navy out of the war, and so protected British lives and ensured the success of the Falkland Islands operation?

Mr. Heseltine: There were undoubted consequences, although the House will be aware that we suffered serious losses after the sinking of the Belgrano, particularly the sinking of HMS Sheffield. Therefore, I very much accept the linkage made by my hon. Friend. The important point is that the Government took military advice in connection with the sinking of the Belgrano expeditiously and, in my view, unavoidably. What Opposition Members must ensure that the House understands is that, if they had rejected that military advice, they would have put our lives at risk.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Does the Secretary of State accept that many right hon. and hon. Members have never sought and do not intend to seek to attack the decision taken by the war cabinet on 30 April to sink the aircraft carrier, which was the first and major military decision on the advice of the Chiefs of Staff? Secondly, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that many of us do not believe that by sinking the Belgrano on 2 May, there was any intention to sink any peace initiative that may or may not have been under way with the Peruvians? What we are not sick and tired of, and what the country will never be sick and tired of, is insisting that the truth be told to the House of Commons. We now find ourselves in a situation in which the Prime Minister, a Secretary of State and several junior Ministers in the Government are on record in *Hansard* as making statements in the House of Commons that we now know not to be true. We have the right and, indeed, the duty to demand that the Government correct the record of *Hansard* in any way that they see fit, preferably through a White Paper that can then be debated — and the sooner the better.

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Gentleman is quite right to draw the attention of the House to the fact that there are differing views about the sinking of the Belgrano, and I would in no way seek to associate him with the views of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), but he will have heard, as I did, the right hon. Gentleman clearly suggest that the log book to which I referred had been "conveniently" lost. There is only one clear implication in that statement. It was to that statement that I was addressing my reply.

I should like to deal now with what was said by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), who, I totally accept, adopts a very different approach to the matter. As the Minister now responsible for advising the Prime Minister on these matters, I have been meticulously through the records, and wherever I felt that it was possible to advise the Prime Minister, having regard to all national interests, that the record could be changed, it has been changed to correct it. The Prime Minister, in letters that are well known, well documented and well publicised, has always accepted the advice that she has been given that, if inaccuracies have been found, they should be put right. She has been meticulous in adjusting the record immediately to come to the facts of the matter.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): Is it not a sign of the death wish in the Labour party that Labour Members should be so anxious to exculpate Argentina, the aggressor against our British fellow subjects in the Falkland Islands, and to damage the reputation of the Royal Navy and the British nation, which unitedly repelled that aggression from those British islands?

Mr. Heseltine: I totally accept my hon. Friend's views. It is extraordinary that so many Members of the House are apparently more interested in the views provided for them by Argentine sources than those provided by their own Government. But when my hon. Friend refers to a death wish on the part of the Opposition, I find one curious contradiction. It is difficult for corpses to die twice.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I should like to return to the log, which I understand is the subject of this private notice question — *[Interruption.]* I shall deal with that later. Is the Secretary of State aware that when I asked the Prime Minister two parliamentary questions on 22 and 29 October this year, she apparently referred to and consulted the log before replying to them? Is the Secretary of State also aware that someone has been called to the board of inquiry from Orkney who has had no connection with the Conqueror for at least a year? Can the Secretary of State tell us exactly when he, or officers of his Department, last saw the log?

Mr. Heseltine: The Prime Minister, in replying to the hon. Gentleman, relied upon general classification rules which would apply to all such log books.

On the second point, I very much doubt whether Ministers have seen the log.

Mr. Foulkes: Or officials of the Department?

Mr. Heseltine: I would have to inquire into that. *[Interruption.]* I believe—I will verify this—that the log would be in the hands of the Navy and that it would not have come into the hands of officials of my Department. I will check on the situation. As I made plain in my first reply, the log is a routine document such as is carried by all submarines and ships, and I believe that as such it would not normally come to officials in the Ministry of Defence.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. Friend emphasise that, as he told the Select Committee in his evidence this morning, there is a vast difference between the navigator's log and the captain's log? Is it not quite extraordinary that Opposition Members seem to pay more attention to information planted or leaked by the Argentines than to our own officials, or our own Royal Navy?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is perfectly right about the fact that Opposition Members seem more inclined to listen to information provided by former enemies of this country than that provided by their own Government.

She is also perfectly right to draw our attention to the distinction between the records that the captain would keep

and the record in the log that we are considering, which would not include any tactical information or any references to the position of Argentine ships. The record in the commander's log would be very different, and that document is in the secure keeping of the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): Is the Secretary of State aware that, as Argentina had engaged in unprovoked aggression, anything that happened to the Argentine armed forces, including war vessels, was brought on themselves? The course of the Belgrano is totally irrelevant. However, is the right hon. Gentleman also aware that certain questions remain to be answered and that, in those circumstances, the fact that the log is missing is more serious and may have sinister connotations? It is essential that the log should be traced as quickly as possible.

Mr. Heseltine: I very much support what the right hon. Gentleman has said. This is a serious matter, and that is why a board of inquiry is looking into the circumstances surrounding the loss. As soon as I can reach a conclusion which is based on what I am told by the inquiry, I shall be very pleased.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): In my view, the sinking of the Belgrano was absolutely necessary and HMS Conqueror did a very good job. Nevertheless, the loss of a log book is a serious matter. Can my right hon. Friend tell me whether, with the modern electronic methods of communication with vessels under water anywhere in the world, it would not have been possible to track HMS Conqueror's passage under water at that time? If that is so, would a copy of such a record not be available in the Ministry of Defence?

Mr. Heseltime: I very much agree with my hon. Friend's first point. However, I doubt whether there would be sufficient certainty about electronic communications to enable them to replace the manual log records which we are discussing. To the best of my knowledge, manual methods are indispensable to the keeping of a routine record.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Those of us who have been in war know what happens in war. However, statements were made to this House in good faith and then withdrawn, and that created the impression outside the House that something untoward was happening. The loss of the log book has added to that feeling. Would it not therefore be a good idea to publish a White Paper giving all the facts?

Mr. Heseltine: I have great respect for the role played by the right hon. Gentleman in the investigation of the surroundings of the Falklands war. I take seriously the point that he has made, which has also been made by other hon. Members. However, my conclusion reluctantly has to be that, having meticulously checked the information and in the light of the widest interests of national security, the Government have corrected—wherever possible and appropriate—the record of things said to the House with the best of intentions but without all the information which is often difficult quickly to obtain in wartime. Despite the fact that the record has been corrected and that the Prime Minister has set out the scene in the widest possible context, the same persistent inquiries continue to try and obtain information that the Prime Minister has rightly made it clear no responsible Government would consider publishing. It is in complete contrast with the way in which intelligence sources from Argentina are used by various parties in this country to try to illicit from the Government comments on such matters which could only be against the national interest, and no Government will do that.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Unless my constituents are wholly different from those of the other 649 constituencies, they are——

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): They are very lucky.

Mr. Adley: My hon. Friend, from whom I have acquired many of them, will confirm that that is not so. My constituents are not only disinterested in the matter, as a matter of current events, but they are appalled to think that Her Majesty's loyal Opposition, who are supposed to go under that name, spend their time doing nothing but denigrate the Government of the day who were doing what they were supposed to do, were they not, in pursuing a war started by our enemies? Does my right hon. Friend not believe that the biblical phrase "love thine enemy" has now reached ridiculous proportions in the way in which the Opposition appear to swallow everything in favour of Argentina, and do everything that they can to denigrate Her Majesty's Government and the Royal Navy?

Mr. Heseltine: Many of us have always had the most profound admiration for the judgment of my hon. Friend's constituents for sending him back here with one of the largest Conservative majorities in the country. I share his judgment that the overwhelming majority of people in this country believe that the Prime Minister acted correctly and would have had only one criticism—if she had taken any decision other than the one that she did.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Does the Secretary of State agree that we are not dealing with the Prime Minister's judgment today; we are dealing with the loss of a log book? Does he further agree that, if he were on the Opposition Benches, he would not be describing it as a routine document; he would be lashing the Government of the day for the loss of a valuable document which he has described as classified? First, will he tell us what the classification was, and, secondly, will he confirm that he does not know when it was lost?

Mr. Heseltine: I can confirm that I do not yet have the full facts about the loss of this document. That is one of the matters to which the board of inquiry is appropriately addressing itself. I cannot be expected to define the document in the Ministry of Defence as though I were on the Opposition Benches, particularly as I happen to have the definition of the log books given to me by those people who know what log books are. It seems appropriate that, as Secretary of State for Defence, I should rely upon the Royal Navy rather than Her Majesty's loyal Opposition.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that we are talking about the navigator's notebook, which is a jottings pad used by a navigator for fixes and other relevant navigational information? We are not talking about the ship's log. The ship's log of HMS Conqueror has all the information as to what that ship was doing, where it was, where it was going and the exercises or undertakings that it was on.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is correct. I tried to make that distinction in the reply that I first gave to the House. I have already seen a pro forma copy of one of these documents. Indeed, I have one in front of me. It is a technical record kept by the ship's navigator and duty officers. It gives technical information and it is not a record from the captain or commanding officer dealing with the wider issues. [HON. MEMBERS: "Is it important?"] I am asked whether the document is important. Certainly it is important, and that is why it is classified. It is not important in the context of trying to see the tactical judgment reached by the commanding officer, but it is important to our enemies in trying to see the way in which the Royal Navy disposes of its ships at sea. If the Opposition's suggestion is that the Royal Navy should publish technical details of its military tactics, that would be a major breach of the national interest.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Secretary of State make it clear that a helmsman's log of this type would be of vital significance in determining the position and manoeuvring characteristics of the ship when going into action? Does he agree that in any inquiry into the sinking of a foreign vessel such a document would be of the utmost importance to the Admiralty and to the Ministry of Defence in examining the conduct of the commander of the vessel? What instructions has the right hon. Gentleman now given to secure all logs of all the vessels in that campaign to ensure that there is no repetition of such vital documents being lost or misplaced?

Mr. Heseltine: The standing orders of the Department would be appropriate to secure the records of the Department. The fact that there has been a breach is a matter of concern and the subject of an inquiry. The hon. Gentleman's first question makes my point for me. A revelation of the way in which our ships negotiate pending an attack would convey nothing to the Admiralty, which would have designed the tactics, but it would tell enemies or potential enemies how we pursue that kind of activity.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a private notice question. We have spent 20 minutes on it. As there is important business before us, I think that we should now move on.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you confirm that Select Committees of the House have a right to call for persons and papers appropriate to their inquiries? Will you give the House guidance as to the right of the Executive to withhold papers from Select Committees? On what classification can that be done? On behalf of the House and members of Select Committees, will you make inquiries of the Ministry of Defence as to the terms of reference of its inquiry and when it intends to make available all the papers requested by Select Committees?

Mr. Speaker: I think that the House is well aware of the rules governing Select Committees. If a Select Committee is not satisfied with the information provided or believes that information has been withheld, it is up to the Select Committee to make a report to the House. I have had no such report on this matter.

BILLS PRESENTED

NEW TOWNS AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS

Mr. Secretary Jenkin, supported by Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. Secretary Edwards, Mr. John Moore, Mr. Ian Gow, and Sir George Young, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to certain matters connected with new towns; to amend paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 31 to the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 4].

MINERAL WORKINGS

Mr. Secretary Jenkin, supported by Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. Secretary Edwards, Mr. Secretary King, Mr. Michael Jopling, Mr. John Moore, and Mr. Neil Macfarlane, presented a Bill to repeal certain provisions of the Mineral Workings Acts 1951 and 1971, to transfer the assets of the Ironstone Restoration Fund to the British Steel Corporation, to make further provision about agricultural ironstone land and forestry on ironstone land, to confer powers in connection with the reclamation, improvement or bringing into use of certain land, and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 2].

ELECTIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND)

Mr. Secretary Hurd, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Brittan, Mr. John Biffen, Mr. Peter Rees, the Attorney-General, Dr. Rhodes Boyson, Mr. Nicholas Scott, and Mr. Chris Patten, presented a Bill to make further provision for preventing personation at elections in Northern Ireland: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 1].

Business of the House

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 6 (Arrangement of public business) shall have effect for this Session with the following modifications, namely:—

In paragraph (3) the word 'twelve' shall be substituted for the word 'ten' in line 16; and in paragraph (6) the word 'nine' shall be substituted for the word 'ten' in line 41;

(2) Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 18th and 25th January, 1st, 8th, 15th and 22nd February, 19th and 26th April, 3rd, 10th and 17th May and 5th July;

(3) Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence over Government business on 30th November, 7th and 14th December, 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th March and 7th June and ballots for these Notices shall be hald after Questions on Wednesday 14th November, Wednesday 21st November, Wednesday 28th November, Wednesday 13th February, Wednesday 20th February, Wednesday 27th February, Wednesday 6th March, Wednesday 13th March and Wednesday 22nd May.

(4) On Monday 17th December, Monday 11th February, Monday 13th May and Monday 1st July, Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence until Seven o'clock and ballots for these Notices shall be held after Questions on Thursday 29th November, Thursday 24th January, Thursday 25th April and Thursday 13th June;

(5) No Notice of Motion shall be handed in for any of the days on which Private Members' Notices have precedence under this Order in anticipation of the Ballot for that day.—*[Mr. Biffen.]*

2.58 pm

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): The motion is slightly unusual. It differs from the usual annual motion setting out the days for private members' business in that it seeks to alter Standing Order No. 6. The alteration will no doubt be welcomed by the whole House as it will increase by one the number of days allocated for private members' business as against Government business in the forthcoming Session.

My point, however, is this. If an alteration to a Standing Order of the House can so easily be proposed through a routine business motion of this kind, why did not the right hon. Gentleman propose at the same time a further alteration to the same Standing Order in relation to the number of days allocated to the Opposition? I should like an increase in the number. Even if that is not possible, there is a continuing feeling of injustice on the part of alliance Members in that all Opposition days are allocated to the Labour party. The Leader of the House should come to the Dispatch Box and explain why he continues to say that the matter is for the Select Committee on Procedure when the Committee has batted it back to the House.

It is as easy for the Leader of the House to propose another alteration under Standing Order No. 6 as the one he proposed this afternoon. The Gracious Speech is so thin that there is plenty of opportunity and room for manoeuvre on his part to give us more Opposition days and to ensure that minority parties are justly treated. He has an obligation to explain his position as Leader of the whole House.

3.1 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): The leader of the Liberal party made a wholly untrue statement about the Select Committee on Procedure. It arranged its day of sitting to suit the convenience of the leader of the Liberal party who scarcely ever bothered to turn up, and it never said that the matter was not for it. *[Interruption.]* His Chief Whip asked to meet it on a certain afternoon but did not turn up. The Select Committee on Procedure has not at any stage said that the matter was not for it. It decides its own priorities for discussing business which falls partly within its domain. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) made a wholly untrue statement about the Select Committee, doubtless in the good faith of ignorance, and should withdraw it.

Too often the Liberal party has abused the House in that it wishes all other hon. Members to organise their affairs to suit it. Despite that, all hon. Members know that the Liberal Benches are empty during debates. Generally, one Liberal Member comes in, speaks and then disappears. *[Interruption.]* That is the truth of the matter. Therefore, for the right hon. Gentleman to use an occasion when the Government are proposing to increase time for private Members' Bills to air a grievance which is untrue and to make a complaint against the Select Committee on Procedure—of which I am a member—which is also untrue, is deliberately to deceive hon. Members who do not know what is done in that Committee.

3.3 pm

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): It ill becomes the leader of the Liberal party to seek to implement his party conference decisions by raising points such as this when they could have been raised by his Chief Whip in the Select Committee. The hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) put the case clearly. During the last Parliament the Select Committee discussed the matter and decided to reduce the total number of Opposition days, among other matters. The present Select Committee under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) discussed the matter when it was raised by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), and decided that, since it had made the change as recently as 1983, it would be inappropriate to consider a further change in Opposition days now. The Select Committee's priority was to consider the proposals for shorter speeches, which we dealt with last week, and for procedure in Standing Committees, with which we are dealing now. I deplore the attempt by the leader of the Liberal party to waste the time of the House with such a narrow party point on such an important day.

3.4 pm

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Before I take a point of order, I should tell the House that it would be inappropriate to raise in the Chamber matters from a Select Committee which has not reported.

Mr. Johnston: It is a fact that Liberals do not often make trouble in the House—*[Interruption.]* You know that to be a fact, Mr. Speaker. This is one of the few opportunities that we have openly in the House to raise such a matter, and my right hon. Friend raised it in the knowledge that the Select Committee on Procedure had the matter before it, but decided to postpone its discussion until after a long discussion on public Bills procedure.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is just the point that I made a moment ago. We must not discuss in the Chamber matters that are discussed by a Select Committee which has not reported.

Mr. Johnston: Our point is that we get one Supply day out of 19, and that is——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is as may be, but it is not what the motion is about. The motion is about private Members' Bills, not about Supply days.

Mr. Johnston: May I ask for your guidance, Mr. Speaker? Is it proper to ask questions about Standing Order No. 6, the amendment of which is dealt with in this motion?

Mr. Speaker: Yes, provided that it is related to what is on the Order Paper. If the hon. Gentleman can do that, fair enough.

Mr. Johnston: That is what we are seeking briefly to do, Mr. Speaker. We are seeking to argue to the Leader of the House that he should not concern himself only with a marginal matter—it provides only one more day for private Members' Bills—but that he should give equal attention to the fact that a considerable minority group, the Liberal party and the Social Democratic party, which together obtained only 2 per cent. fewer votes than did the Labour party at the general election, should get more than one day out of 19 in a year.

3.7 pm

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is appropriate to draw attention to all of Standing Order No. 6, since the Leader of the House has chosen, with the agreement I believe of the entire House, to make an important change and to respect the views of private Members and give greater opportunity for private Members' legislation. It is recognised, especially when there is a large Government majority, that there is greater scope for private Members' time.

However, the alliance parties wish to bring to the attention of the Leader of the House, the House as a whole and those Members who serve on the Select Committee Procedure—I do not challenge their rights as members of that Committee to determine the order of business which they consider to be important—the fact that there is a strong feeling among a minority in the House that the allocation of Opposition days does not reflect the realities of the political position in the House. I do not even extend it beyond the House to the country as a whole.

What is even worse is that the 19 Opposition days are allocated to the Liberal party, the SDP and the Scottish National party by the Labour party. The allocation lies completely within the gift of the Labour party. The House should know how the allocation is sometimes exercised. At the time of the Crosby by-election, when it was obvious that all members of the alliance would be fighting during that campaign, half a day was allocated to the alliance — *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members make my point. Television cameras have not yet come in to record our proceedings, but radio has, and the 26 per cent. of the electorate who voted for alliance candidates can hear what is happening. In the constituencies of many Conservative Members at the general election, the Labour party candidates lost their deposits, and the main challenge to Conservative Members came from SDP and Liberal candidates. The country will recognise that Conservative Members do not want a credible Opposition; they want the Labour party to continue as the only Opposition. The Labour Opposition can be described as "official" until hon. Members are blue in the face, but the House needs a credible Opposition, which in their hearts is what I believe Conservative Members wish to have.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not wildly out of order to refer to the matters which the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) is raising on a motion which is in no way concerned with them?

Mr. Speaker: What I said earlier is correct. The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) and other hon. Members who wish to participate in this debate must relate their remarks to what is on the Order Paper. We are seeking to amend paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 6, not paragraph (2), which relates to the 19 allotted Opposition days. The right hon. Member for Devonport must therefore advance an argument relating to private Members' time, not to Opposition days.

Dr. Owen: The Leader of the House has moved that

"Standing Order No. 6 (Arrangement of public business) shall have effect for this Session with the following modifications".

Surely we have not reached the stage where we cannot argue that there should be further modifications of Standing Order No. 6. While welcoming the modifications which the Leader of the House has proposed — *[Interruption.]* I know that it is inconvenient, but this situation will recur. We shall not be silenced because we feel strongly about this—*[Interruption.]* A Government Whip asks why we do not table an amendment. I think I am right in saying that we are unable to do so. It is extraordinary that the Whips do not even know that we are not able to amend the motion. Had we been able to do so, and had the Leader of the House consulted us, we would then have sought a proper debate. We do not want debates such as we had yesterday and today so that we can make our case. However, you, Mr. Speaker, know better than anyone that this House operates on the basis of a certain understanding in all sections of the House. We feel aggrieved, and beyond the House millions of voters feel aggrieved. That feeling will not go away.

The Leader of the House has two responsibilities. He is a member of the Cabinet and the Conservative party; but he is also Leader of the House. The right hon. Gentleman may smile, but he knows well that he must wear these two hats. He must square his loyalty to the Government and the Conservative party with his wider loyalty to this House. I believe that he thinks that the Labour party can create more trouble for him than we can, and therefore believes that it is not worth the aggro further to change this Standing Order because the Labour party has more disruptive power. I am afraid that that may have to be put to the test — [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] We do not particularly wish to do so, but we are not prepared to— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Dr. Owen: Minorities in this House have rights. They have fought for them and will continue to fight for them. No one is more aware of the rights of minorities than the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), who has protected the rights of minorities. He was on a different point, which was the question——

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order to seek to debate on one amendment an amendment on an entirely different subject?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have a right to protect minorities as well. The point made by the right hon. Member for Devonport is correct. We are discussing the motion that,

"Standing Order No. 6 (Arrangement of public business) shall have effect for this Session with the following modifications".

As I understand it, the right hon. Gentleman is arguing that there should be other modifications as well.

Dr. Owen: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You are the protector of minorities, and we are grateful to you. We do not wish to filibuster on this motion. We wish an explanation from the Leader of the House showing why he has sought to make only this modification. Why he does not think it right to come before the House with a proposal to make modifications to the issue that aggrieves us—that is that there should be an allocation of Opposition days to the Social Democrats, the Liberals, the Scottish nationalists and the Ulster Unionists? It should not be left to the whim of the leader of the Labour party, or Labour party groups, to allocate the days. The Labour party won 28 per cent. of the votes in the last election and, on the basis of an extra 2 per cent., we are not prepared to treat it as if it had a monopoly in the allocation of Opposition days. We shall have to debate that reality.

Therefore, the Leader of the House, having already listened to this debate not once but twice in this Session, will have to come to the House with concrete proposals. That is what we want. If not, he owes it to the House and the public to explain why he thinks that the Labour party should control the allocation of time. That is not fair, and the Leader of the House knows that it is not fair. It makes the House a laughing stock and it reduces the influence and prestige of the House, and he knows that in his heart of hearts. The only reason why he will not change the system is that he believes that offending the Labour party will cause more difficulty for him. That is an unworthy reason, and I hope that he will give the House other reasons, and then promise that at an early date he will introduce subsequent modifications to Standing Order No. 6 that meet our objections.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must raise a new point of order, as I have already dealt with the previous point of order.

Mr. Roberts: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am concerned about the rights of minorities on Supply days, and about private Members' days. As a Merseyside Labour Member of Parliament, I am sick and tired of coming to debates and——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall stop the hon. Gentleman there. This is not a point of order. I think that he wishes to make a speech.

Mr. Roberts: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman wishes to make a speech. He is at liberty to do so, but he must not abuse the system by seeking to make a speech on a point of order. If he resumes his seat, I shall call him at the appropriate time.

3.18 pm

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) has uttered a serious threat — to make life difficult. I am sure that none of us would wish to see the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins) or the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) brought in to back up his demand. Equally, I deplore the playboy attitude of the Liberal and Social Democrat alliance, which seeks to bypass the normal procedures of the House. The right hon. Member for Devonport has been in the House longer than I have and he knows full well that a proposal such as his is a matter for the Select Committee on Procedure to investigate. *[Interruption.]* Those who are interrupting from a sedentary position can speak later if they wish. I did not interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, and I am sure that the House would like to hear what I am suggesting.

I resent the fact that the antics of Members on the Opposition Benches will deprive Back Benchers of the opportunity to speak in the major debate today which has a 10 o'clock limit, just as they did yesterday.

Here is an opportunity for the matter to be brought to a head and for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to say, as he said before, that this is a matter for the Select Committee on Procedure and that it should be put at the top of the Committee's agenda.

3.21 pm

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): I have listened to the debate and to the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) and I am sick and tired of being told that the Social Democrats and the Liberals do not have fair representation in the House. I represent Merseyside and I am secretary of the Merseyside group of 12 Labour Members and I am fed up with coming to debates here and not being called. I then have to return to my constituents on Merseyside and explain that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) is automatically called, knows that he will be called and, because he knows that, is reported in the local newspapers.

Mr. Speaker: Order. What the hon. Gentleman is saying has nothing to do with the motion. If the motion is passed, there will be an extra day on which he may be called.

Mr. Roberts: I am speaking to the Standing Order because I am answering the points made by the right hon. Member for Devonport. He continues to quote, in justification of his Supply days proposal, that the alliance has 26 per cent. of the votes as opposed to 28 per cent. for the Labour party. He must realise that he got that 26 per cent. of the votes on a first-past-the-post system when people were urged to vote tactically. Hundreds of thousands of people in Britain who are Labour voters voted tactically to get the Tory Government out and many Tory voters voted tactically to get Labour Members out in a first-past-the-post system. That happened when people did not think that their first preference had a chance. Had they thought that those votes would be totalled nationally to justify extra time being given to the alliance as opposed to their first choice, they would not have so voted.

Mr. Speaker: Order. As has been said, we have an important debate before us and a long list of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to speak. The hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) must stick to the point. He is now miles and miles wide of it.

Mr. Roberts: Will the Leader of the House consider special Supply days for the Merseyside group of Labour Members?

3.23 pm

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): It might be helpful if I were to intervene at this stage before the debate reduces the issue of the environment to the status of an Adjournment debate.

The motion is narrowly drawn and refers to private Members' time. With all the charity in the world, I cannot regard the great lesser Opposition parties as an adjunct to private Members. It has been suggested that there is something startlingly novel about what is now being proposed. It is perfectly true that it is a deal which accords to private Members rather more days than a strict interpretation of Standing Order No. 6. However, I cannot claim to be a reformer, because exactly the same arrangement was made in 1982-83. On that basis, I most earnestly recommend the motion to the House.

I appreciate that issues of real moment to the right hon. Members for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) and for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) have been raised. We immediately encounter certain procedural booby traps, as has been pointed out by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), when trying to assess the arguments. I do not think that this is the appropriate moment to deal with the matter, standing as I do in the way of the resumption of the debate on the Queen's Speech, but I have the responsibility of winding up the debate and I shall certainly take account of what has been said this afternoon.

3.25 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): We welcome the measure that the Leader of the House has introduced.

We might be a little more worried about the fact that the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) feels aggrieved if the issues about which he feels aggrieved had a modicum of consistency. I cannot recollect any occasion when he expressed anxiety about the way in which Opposition time was allocated when he sat on these Benches, even though it might sometimes have led to a degree of rough justice for his new-found allies, the Liberals.

I remind the House that when the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues deserted these Benches and scuttled down the Chamber to the Bench that they now occupy they immediately accosted the House and demanded that they should be allowed time on the ground not that they represented a single voter anywhere in the country for their new-found party but that they represented a certain percentage of the membership of the House. They now suddenly represent an even smaller percentage of the membership, so they are trying to change the ground yet again and are arguing that the matter should be judged not by the number of hon. Members in the House but by the votes cast in the country. When the right hon. Gentleman has got his act together, he might be taken seriously.

3.27 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Well—Mr. Carlile.

Mr. Carlile: Despite the pain in your voice, Mr. Speaker—I say that with great respect—I am most grateful to you for calling me. This debate is important. It is vital that we should be realistic—as I hope hon. Members always try to be—in deciding whether this is the appropriate time to raise this issue. I would argue that it is the appropriate time and it is worth putting the reason why on the record. The Select Committee on Procedure has refused to consider this matter in the near future, so our only opportunity of obtaining urgent consideration for it is on the Floor of the House.

Standing Order No. 6 is one of the most important Standing Orders, because it sets out the rules by which debates are timetabled. The House is judged in the country not only by the quality of debates and the behaviour of hon. Members but by its conduct and the timetabling of debates. It must therefore be asked whether the House is fair in its attitude towards not only the Government and the Labour party but towards all the other parties in the House, including the Liberal and Social Democratic parties, which between them represent 7·75 million electors and their children——

Mr. McWilliam *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I heard that, too.

Mr. McWilliam: On a point of order of substance, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for any hon. Member to claim to represent the electors in another hon. Member's constituency? That is what the hon. and learned Gentleman is doing.

Mr. Speaker: That is one thing; but it is quite another to claim to represent the votes of children.

Mr. Carlile: I should like to make a simple but telling point — [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] It is extremely surprising that Conservative Members should be unwilling to take Standing Order No. 6 seriously since it decides the way in which debates should be distributed. Their levity is a disgrace to the House.

The simple point at issue is that this House is part of the High Court of Parliament. Surely Conservative Members will agree that this High Court of Parliament should act according to the rules of natural justice—*[Interruption.]* Obviously, some of them do not agree with that, which is most surprising. I believe that this High Court of Parliament should act in accordance with the rules of natural justice that are incumbent on every court and organisation that exercise a similar function. The rules set by Standing Order No. 6 are offensive to the rules of natural justice. How can the House command the nation's respect for its procedures if the procedures are so offensive to the rules of natural justice?

Mr. Steel: My hon. Friend should remind the House that Standing Order No. 6 was drafted in the last Parliament when the arithmetical balance within the House, let alone outside, was wholly different. Our complaint is that not only did the Select Committee on Procedure in the last Session fail to deal with the matter and reported its refusal to the House, but that the Leader of the House is not willing to amend Standing Order No. 6 on this occasion, as he could, to meet our just demands. The Leader of the House has not taken up the suggestion that he should ask the Select Committee to put the issue at the top of its agenda for this Session. If he agreed to any of those steps, we could move on.

Mr. Carlile: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, and I agree with him. I remind the House of what the Secretary

of State for the Environment—I am glad to see him in the Chamber — said in Bristol on 5 October. When criticising the Labour party, he said:

"The real opposition will come increasingly from the alliance parties."

Of course he is right, and it is high time that our procedures recognised that.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 222, Noes 15.

Division No. 2] **[3.30 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Anderson, Donald
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Barron, Kevin
Bellingham, Henry
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Butterfill, John
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Ciwyd, Mrs Ann
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Donald
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Durant, Tony
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garrett, W. E.
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hardy, Peter
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lord, Michael
Loyden, Edward
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Fergus
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Needham, Richard
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Park, George
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pike, Peter
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powley, John
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Sheerman, Barry
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert
Watson, John
Watts, John
Weetch, Ken
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

NOES

Alton, David
Bruce, Malcolm
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Cartwright, John
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
Johnston, Russell
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Penhaligon, David
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Wainwright, R.
Wilson, Gordon

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 6 (Arrangement of public business) shall have effect for this Session with the following modifications, namely:—

In paragraph (3) the word 'twelve' shall be substituted for the word 'ten' in line 16; and in paragraph (6) the word 'nine' shall be substituted for the word 'ten' in line 41;

(2) Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 18th and 25th January, 1st, 8th, 15th and 22nd February, 19th and 26th April, 3rd, 10th and 17th May and 5th July;

(3) Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence over Government business on 30th November, 7th and 14th December, 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th March and 7th June and ballots for these Notices shall be held after Questions on Wednesday 14th November, Wednesday 21st November, Wednesday 28th November, Wednesday 13th February,

Wednesday 20th February, Wednesday 27th February, Wednesday 6th March, Wednesday 13th March and Wednesday 22nd May.

(4) On Monday 17th December, Monday 11th February, Monday 13th May and Monday 1st July, Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence until Seven o'clock and ballots for these Notices shall be held after Questions on Thursday 29th November, Thursday 24th January, Thursday 25th April and Thursday 13th June;

(5) No Notice of Motion shall be handed in for any of the days on which Private Members' Notices have precedence under this Order in anticipation of the Ballot for that day.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [6 November]

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament—*[Sir Paul Bryan.]*

Question again proposed.

Local Government and Transport

3.43 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Patrick Jenkin): I think that by common consent the most significant measure foreshadowed in the Gracious Speech is the Local Government Bill. The words are:

"A Bill will be introduced to abolish the Greater London Council and the metropolitan county councils."

When our manifesto was published in 1983 with that pledge, some people doubted our commitment. Then they thought that the legislation would not be ready in time. Now some of them think that abolition will not be completed in time. Such people have been proved to be wrong every step of the way. I do not necessarily put Mr. Kenneth Livingstone in quite that category.

As I think many hon. Members know, Mr. Livingstone has always had parliamentary ambitions. The right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) knows it better than most people. Nothing would suit Mr. Livingstone's purpose less than for his own advertising campaign to succeed and for the GLC to survive. Fancy being condemned for life to be the leader of the Labour group on the GLC. That is hardly the sort of future that Chairman Ken sees for himself.

Let me make it absolutely clear. The Government are totally committed to the abolition of the GLC and the six metropolitan county councils. If Parliament passes the Bill, at midnight on 31 March 1986 those councils will cease to exist and almost all their powers will devolve on the London boroughs and metropolitan district councils. An unnecessary tier of government will have been removed. The tier in the metropolitan counties is responsible for only one quarter of the spending on local services and the tier in London is responsible for barely more than one tenth of the spending on local services. Taking account of services such as health, the police and several others, the figure falls to substantially below 10 per cent. So much for the much-vaunted case of who runs London when the GLC goes.

The Bill will be published quite soon and will necessarily be detailed. There have been attempts to spread the story that it will be only an enabling Bill, falling far short of its predecessors—the 1963 and 1972 Acts. Quite untrue! The Bill will provide in detail for the transfer of the statutory functions of the GLC and MCCs.

We have had to draft the Bill with little or no help from most of the local authorities concerned. Of the main metropolitan local authority associations, only the London Boroughs Association has been prepared to take any part in the talks. It is, of course, for local government to decide how to respond to Government policy initiatives. All I would say is that people can hardly grumble if the Bill does not take account of points that they might have made, but have chosen not to.

Instead of making a constructive input, the GLC—and, to a lesser extent, the MCCs—have taken refuge in what I can only describe as frivolities. Members may be unaware that today is the much trumpeted "day of protest" by Left-wing authorities in and outside London, their intention being to stop abolition and, I believe, Rate-capping with strikes and demos. Fortunately for most people it has turned out much like any other day.

Here in London, two key unions, the GLC Staff Association and the Fire Brigades Union, decided to take no part in that charade and, indeed, the Staff Association has withdrawn from the "Democracy for London" campaign, believing quite rightly that the "day of protest" will alienate public opinion. In pointless demonstrations like that the people who suffer are the children whose schools are closed, the old folk, the handicapped and those who depend on the services that cease to be provided. Once again, we see Mr. Livingstone failing to get the mass backing that he claims. I am told that at county hall itself more than half the staff are working normally—jolly good for them.

None of the MCCs has attempted to rival the extravagance of the GLC. Of course, they are only 10 years old. However, they have not seen fit to spend huge sums of ratepayers' money on nonsenses such as the GLC's so-called pink 95th birthday cake. I was told that the GLC expected about 1 million people to visit that extravaganza outside county hall, but I understand that so far attendance has fallen short by some 935,000.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Did my right hon. Friend see in today's edition of the *Daily Telegraph* a massive double-page advertisement inserted by the GLC, fighting the democratically elected Government? Will he hazard a guess as to how much that cost? Does he agree that it is a complete abuse of the GLC's position as custodian of the ratepayers' money? How soon can he bring an end to such massive abuse?

Mr. Jenkin: I share my hon. Friend's profound distaste for that style of local authority spending, and I will have something to say about it.

The success of the GLC's campaign was well measured by the success of their circus-stunt by-elections in September. Unfortunately for the GLC, the tightrope snapped. We were told that voters from every party would come out in huge numbers in order to support the four Labour candidates and the GLC. What happened? Compared with 1981, the total Labour vote fell by 8,000. So dismal was the response in London that the metropolitan counties hurriedly abandoned their plans to follow suit.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: So much for the £10 million campaign of ratepayers' money squandered by the GLC. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow)

[Mr. Jenkin]

is right to criticise it. Not only has it been a waste of ratepayers' money, but it is bogus. If one studies the lists of functions set out in the tables in annex C of the yellow book on the transfer of functions, one sees that, overwhelmingly, the functions of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils will go to local district and borough councils. A few—very few—will go to other bodies. For instance — and I believe that this arrangement has the support of the Opposition Front Bench—the historic buildings unit in London will join the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission and so join its undoubted expertise to that of the commission.

The main burden of the campaign of the GLC and the MCCs is that their powers will somehow be swallowed up by Whitehall. That was why, at Question Time the other day, I said that the advertising campaign was a tissue of lies—and so it is. But now the GLC and the MCCs have the brass to complain to me that I am being unfair.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): The right hon. Gentleman tells us that most of the functions of the GLC and—as he said—the MCCs are to be taken over by fully democratic accountable authorities. Is that really true of Merseyside? Less than 20 per cent. of the total functions of the Merseyside county council will go to directly elected smaller district councils —or 4 per cent. to each of the five district councils on Merseyside. The rest of the functions will go to quangos, probably appointed by the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman persists in propagating the same errors as the MCCs. No one has ever regarded a local government joint committee or joint board as a quango. It consists of elected councillors, nominated by elected councils. That is the service which devolves upon those councils, acting jointly. If the hon. Gentleman cannot understand that now, he will have a tough time on the Standing Committee—if he is appointed to it.

I have said that the propaganda campaign was a tissue of lies. When one considers how much money has been spent on trying to bamboozle the people, one sees that the complaints are absurd. I note that the GLC's expenditure on advertising has been challenged by the district auditor. As the matter may now go before the courts, it would not be proper for me to comment, except to say that in the eyes of millions of Londoners it has been nothing but a scandal that the GLC has squandered such sums on such a campaign.

Mr. Tony Banks: Hearing this knockabout stuff from the right hon. Gentleman is like being assaulted by a blancmange. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman is about to make some points of substance. Does he not accept that the district auditor has considered the GLC's expenditure on its public information campaign and has said that nothing had been done which was out of order? On what, therefore, does the right hon. Gentleman base his final remark?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman must await proceedings. We shall see what happens if the GLC challenges the auditor's findings.

The GLC and the MCCs should be thinking about their ratepayers and their staffs. It is their interests that should be uppermost now in the minds of their elected representatives. The great majority of staff will of course have a continuing role in the new structure.

We have already established a staff commission and I shall shortly be publishing a memorandum setting out in more detail our proposals for staff transfers and for compensation for those who do not find places in the structure. I hope that in the interests of their staff, councils and the unions will start talking to the staff commission.

When the Bill is published, we shall give our estimate of savings. However, I can tell the House that our best estimate is that, on rationalisation, savings alone will be close to the figure that we suggested at the last election. My message today to all authorities involved is that the policy goes steadily forward. I am confident that the House will shortly signify its agreement in principle by giving a Second Reading to the Local Government Bill.

There are several other local government issues which, although not specifically mentioned in the Gracious Speech, are likely to figure in debates in the House. In the last Session, Parliament gave its approval to the Rates Act, and the proceedings of the Act are now being implemented. For instance, representatives of business and commercial ratepayers now have a statutory right to be consulted about local authority budgets and rating decisions. The code of practice has been published, and I hope that up and down the country chambers of commerce and other business organisations are making known their views about what they expect from local government. They may not have votes, but with the new powers their voices can and should be influential.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Everyone has a vote. It is called universal suffrage.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Lady will no doubt be able to make her points when she replies. Even she must realise that companies do not have votes.

Next year, local authorities for the first time will be obliged to provide information about their rating and spending policies to council tenants and others who pay their rates with their rents. In the following year, 1986-87, all domestic ratepayers will receive a breakdown of their rate demand to show how much of what they pay goes to each authority. These measures will help to strengthen accountability.

The House will recognise that the power to limit the rates of high-spending authorities dominated our debates. Rate limitation is an essential part of our present financial policy towards local government. For too long, a minority of extravagant and high-spending councils have snapped their fingers at the spending guidelines approved by the House of Commons, and have forced the Government, year after year, as many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have said, to demand further economies from all authorities, the great majority of which have done their best to live within those guidelines.

The Act, for the first time, gives us the power to bring those high spenders into line and to protect their ratepayers who have been victims of their local authority's extravagance.

Last July I named the 18 councils whose rates will be capped. They account for about three quarters of the budgeted overspend by all authorities this year. In 1978-79, those 18 councils spent a total of £1·3 billion.

This year they are planning to spend over £3 billion. That is a far faster rate of increase than local government costs and the average local government spending.

Two of the councils, Portsmouth and Brent, have made it clear to me that they will live within the limit that we have set and will make every effort to spend no more than the target — 1½ per cent. below the limit — but predictably, of course, the other 16 Labour-controlled authorities have lost no time in setting their massive rate-funded propaganda machine in motion. We have all seen the flood of propaganda claiming that rate limitation will mean the decimation of local services, the closure of nursery schools, old peoples' day centres, a massive increase in rents, and the rest. We know what to expect.

Opposition Members will have read the article in the press by councillor David Wilshire, the leader of Wansdyke district council, who recently found himself at a meeting of the Labour-dominated local government campaign unit. He wrote:

"I heard campaigners urge councils to make unnecessary and sensitive cuts and thus mobilise public opinion against the Government."

That is what they are threatening. Those councils are trying to divert their ratepayers' attention from the fact that most other councils can provide a good service at a much lower cost by cutting waste and inefficiency. Other councils do not divert precious resources from local services to spend on the extravagant and unnecessary political causes so beloved of those high-spending councils.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): How can the right hon. Gentleman say what he has just said about extravagance in the case of Haringey, Portsmouth, Sheffield or Thamesdown? All those authorities have been designated by him under the Rates Act, although their spending has risen by less than the national average and less than many Conservative-controlled authorities not so designated.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is merely looking at the increases. If he considers the general spending and, specificially, the general level of rates that ratepayers have had to pay — some of my hon. Friends representing those areas have been prepared to talk about the rates — he will realise that this measure is indeed overdue.

What I am asking from the majority of these authorities is a cash freeze on what they are spending this year. In other words, we are simply asking them to absorb the cost of inflation between this year and next. When local politicians quote figures for the percentage cuts, nine times out of 10 they compare my figure not with this year's spending but with what they would like to spend next year. Of course it is easy to make a massive shortfall like that. As the hon. Gentleman knows, and as I have said many times, any authority with a genuine case has nothing to fear from the redetermination process. Yet although authorities are busy denouncing the spending levels, not one has yet seen fit to exercise the right of appeal under the Act.

There are two possible explanations for that. No doubt some authorities are prepared to live within the spending levels proposed, so they can put their hands on their hearts and say that they are adopting a principled stand and not applying for redetermination without much cost to themselves. Most of the high-spending authorities can achieve the savings that we seek without dramatic or unduly painful cuts. In other cases, in which circumstances may point to a genuine need for redetermination — for instance, if there has been a substantial use of balances in the current year which cannot be repeated next year—councillors are choosing to sacrifice their ratepayers and employees for the sake of a hardline political front. To betray those interests in that way is a very dangerous game. To those misguided warriors, I stress that I am still prepared to listen to any genuine case that any council wishes to put. But time is running out. I shall soon have to start the process of fixing the rate which, if it is not agreed, will come before the House for sanction.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Department is actively encouraging local authorities to seek redetermination because, unless one of them takes that step, the whole process will be seen to be a sham? Does he agree that he is backing away from day to day, saying that the books will not be examined after all and that there will merely be a cursory general examination of the position? It is a sham, and unless at least one council gives in to it, it will be shown to be a sham.

Mr. Jenkin: That is not the situation at all. Some councils have put it to me through their spokesmen the contention that my statement that we seek merely no cash increase next year over this year bears no relation to the spending limit that we have set. The reason for that may well be that they have artificially reduced their spending this year by the use of balances, which they cannot repeat next year. I can give no categorical assurances, but that is precisely the kind of case which may be appropriate for redetermination. If those councils do not come forward and seek redetermination, they will simply have to live with a very much bigger cut than we intended. The choice is theirs. Under the act passed by the House it is for individual council to come forward.

To avoid any misunderstanding, I should make it clear that it is not the rate but the rate limit that we shall be fixing.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): The Secretary of State is being more than usually disingenuous. As he knows, authorities have not been prepared to seek redetermination because — this includes Portsmouth, if the recorded comments of the council leader are to be believed—they genuinely believe that is a Catch 22 situation. If they appeal to the Secretary of State, he could use his powers to set a lower limit or, if a higher limit is set, impose conditions involving unacceptable interference.

Mr. Jenkin: I am aware that that is what they say. The leader of Portsmouth council has made it abundantly clear to me, and with his authority I made it clear on the radio in Portsmouth, that he is not applying for redetermination because he is prepared to live within the limits and perhaps even get down to the target. Nevertheless, I am aware that others have that fear. At the conference of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and in the House I have tried to make it clear that that fear is groundless and I have explained how I envisage using my discretion under the legislation. If councils find that their rate limit forces them to make bigger savings than we sought to produce in setting the spending limit, they will have only themselves to blame if they have not used the powers provided in the Act.

[Mr. Jenkin]

Some councillors threaten to go further, in defiance of the law—to refuse to set a rate, to ignore the rate limit or deliberately to set a rate that will not match their budget. I urge them to pause and to think very carefully indeed. Under the law, such a course could lead to personal surcharge and disqualification. The irresponsibility of such action would be matched only by its sheer futility.

The law will take its course, with or without the support of the Labour party. However reasonable a face the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) adopt, we know that many members of their party outside the House do not support so basic a principle as the rule of law. At the Labour party conference in Blackpool the Leader of the Opposition said:

"We cannot sharpen legality as our main weapon for the future and simultaneously scorn legality if it doesn't suit us at the present time."

The press reported that the conference cheered him to a man—perhaps with one or two exceptions.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: The next day, the Labour party voted to support any council which broke the law and to recompense individual councillors if they broke the law and were surcharged. In fairness to the hon. Member for Copeland, I must make it clear that those resolutions were carried against his advice. *The Guardian* reported him as saying rather plaintively that they were

"in contradiction of everything Neil and I have been saying on this issue all along".

The local government press reported that he left Blackpool dismayed and anxious—and with reason, because a house so divided against itself is not one in which anyone can put any faith at all. In fact, of course, the law will come to his aid, as we are already beginning to see. Only the other day the leader of Camden council warned of

"hesitancy in our own ranks"

and the risk of financial commitments and responsibilities. The law will be enforced and I have no doubt that it will be obeyed, to the benefit of ratepayers. For all 18 capped councils, rate increases will be lower than they otherwise would have been and in some cases there will actually be rate cuts.

Mr. Heffer: Like most of his colleagues on the Conservative Front Bench, the right hon. Gentleman constantly claims that the labour party does not believe in the rule of law. That is a deliberate untruth and he and they know it. What has been said is that the Government are bringing in laws which democratically elected people will come up against whether they like it or not. It is clear that in those circumstances certain councillors will be forced to fight laws which are unjust and bad and in some respects class laws introduced by the Government in the interests of their own dogmatic attitudes rather than in the interests of democracy in this country.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman stands condemned from his own mouth. He asserts the right of people to pick and choose which laws they will obey. Therefore, I feel strengthened in my belief that the Labour party outside the House and some Labour Members, including the chairman of the Labour party, hold the rule of law in contempt.

A moment ago I made the point that capping the rates of the high spenders would enable me to begin to help the low spenders. In July I announced provisional spending targets for 1985-86 for all local authorities. Those targets implied an increase in current expenditure provision in excess of £800 million—above what was provided in the White Paper. They would allow most responsible low-spending authorities to increase spending next year by 4·25 per cent. in line with the forecast of inflation. That was a substantially better deal for low-spenders than I was able to allow for this year. It would not have been possible without the headroom provided by rate limitation.

By contrast, the highest spending authorities have provisional targets for next year implying cash cuts of up to 1·5 per cent.—meaning real terms cuts of about 6 per cent. Those targets are therefore more realistic than was possible in the current year, but they do not mean relaxation of our determination to hold down all areas of public expenditure, including that by local authorities. For that reason, as the House will recall, I proposed a much tougher grant holdback tariff for next year as a deterrent to further overspending.

Naturally, I have had many comments on those proposals, which are now being considered. I hope to make the full statement at the usual time in December, and the House will then be invited to approve the relevant reports early in the new year.

While that will be the time for detailed debate, perhaps I could just say this. Since 1979, the Government have sought to bring public spending under firm control to reduce the burden on the private wealth-creating sector. Helped by the pressures of the block grant system and by the system of targets and penalties, the great majority of local authorities have played their part in that, and the Government are appreciative of their efforts. It has not been easy and some difficult decisions have had to be taken. Local government, after a prolonged period when local current spending rose steadily, year after year, by an average of around 3·5 per cent. in real terms—well ahead of the growth of GDP—has achieved a reduction in that figure to below 1 per cent. As rate capping begins to bite on the few authorities that have not contributed to that achievement, the figure will improve still further.

Not the least of the consequences of local government's achievement of bringing spending under control is that for this year, 1984-85, rate increases are the lowest for 10 years. It is right to put those achievements of local government on the record for, amid all the argument about the rate support grant system, the Government have worked with local government to secure many of our objectives.

Many councils have made and are making strenuous efforts to become more efficient. That brings me to the question of contracting out local government services. Three years' experience of the direct labour organisation legislation in the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 has shown the substantial benefits of competition for local authority construction and maintenance work. In other services notably refuse collection, significant savings have been achieved either through using private firms or through improved efficiency of councils' own staff faced with competition from outside contractors.

In spite of the evidence of savings to be won, most local authorities still fight shy of seeking competitive tenders for their services. The Government therefore propose to take action to secure more competition in further areas of local government activity. We shall be consulting local authority associations and the relevant sectors of private

industry about extending arrangements, similar to those already applied to construction and maintenance work, to a further range of activities. Our precise proposals will be set out in the consultation paper, but I can tell the House now that they will include such areas as refuse collection, vehicle maintenance, and cleaning, where the private sector has already shown the savings that can be achieved.

That is not all. The Government are convinced that there is scope for greater involvement of the private sector in a wide range of other activities. We shall, therefore, also consult about taking power to require authorities periodically to assess the costs of some other specific activities and to report publicly to their ratepayers on how their own in-house costs compare with the costs of using private sector companies to do the work instead. By that means authorities will become more cost-conscious, and their ratepayers will see where savings could be made.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle) *rose——*

Mr. Jenkin: If the hon. Gentleman will wait for the consultation document, he will find out how those savings will be made.

The private sector for its part will be better able to identify opportunities to tender for work for local authorities. We are convinced that there are worthwhile savings to be made. What is needed now is more effective pressure to go out and get them.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that, if local authorities invite tenders for certain services, when those tenders are submitted the lowest tender will be accepted? Recently, the process has been carried out, the in-house price reduced but not to the lowest level and the most efficient service has not won the tender or the private sector been used.

Mr. Jenkin: We are well aware that some changes are necessary in the 1980 Act to make the DLO legislation effective. When we legislate, which is likely to be next session, we intend to examine and tighten the legislation.

I said a moment ago, that local government had achieved a substantial slowing down of spending and that this year's rate increase was the lowest for 10 years. Nevertheless, I am aware that there is dissatisfaction within local government and outside about the way in which the whole local government finance system works. That dissatisfaction goes much wider than the dislike of rates. It embraces the whole question of how local authorities are financed — a complex mixture of government grants, local rates and fees and charges— and the implications of the regime for local accountability and for central and local government relationships, they are major issues.

That is why I have asked my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, together with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) to undertake a series of internal studies into the whole system. They have already started work. They will look at the main features of the present system, including the rate support grant distribution, the balance between Exchequer and local financing, measures to improve accountability, and how councils might best raise the local revenues they need.

The studies will involve very careful consideration and in due course full consultations on proposals for reform. They will not be completed overnight, nor should they be, for they are intended to provide a sound basis for the financing of local government in the long term.

Concern about the way local government is working is not confined to the financial system. Many observers are worried that the conventions traditionally observed by all political parties in the conduct of local government business are beginning to break down. The way local councils are run is changing. Not all these changes are necessarily bad; indeed, many reflect the changing political and social climate in which local government operates. However, the changes put the system under great strain.

Local government legislation is based on a 19th-century model of councils controlled by part-time councillors operating for the benefit of the community as a whole, with little reference to national politics, but too often today the conventional checks and balances are by-passed, the rights of minorities on councils are overridden, and standing orders are manipulated so as to stifle debate. We see, in some areas, the politicisation of officers. Some job advertisements carry clear signals that, unless political attitudes are openly promoted by candidates, they need not bother to apply. The officers of one council become elected members of another with no recognition whatever given to the conflicts of interest that inevitably arise.

The public, whatever their political beliefs, dislike the use of ratepayers' money for political propaganda. Sections 142 and 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 give wide discretion, but today that discretion is being abused. That presents a challenge to local democracy, but, as I have said, it may also reflect deep secular trends in local government.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When Cabinet Ministers open debates on the Loyal Address it is customary for their speeches to cover the area of their responsibility. The Secretary of State has spoken for more than half an hour about local government and local government finance. However, his Department has broad responsibilities to which he has not referred, including housing and, most importantly, the Government's commitment to conservation.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me. The Secretary of State must take responsibility for his speech. As he has not yet finished, I do not know what he will say.

Mr. Jenkin: I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman, but the subject designated by you, Mr. Speaker, for today's debate was local government and transport. I am opening the debate on local government and, if he catches your eye, Mr. Speaker, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will no doubt say something about transport. Those were the subjects chosen, I understand, after consultation with members of the Opposition Front Bench.

I was talking about abuses and the changed pattern of local government. Those changes are too involved to allow snap decisions and immediate legislation. I have concluded that we need a clear and dispassionate study not only of the abuses but of the underlying changes which those abuses reflect. I shall shortly put before the House proposals for an impartial inquiry into those issues, on which I shall consult the Opposition parties. I shall also be in touch with the local government associations. I am

[Mr. Jenkin]

encouraged by the reactions I have received so far to my preliminary announcement of my intention to hold such an inquiry. I am sure that local government generally recognises the value of this study aimed at protecting the future health of local democracy.

There are many other topics which hon. Members on both sides of the House will wish to raise during the debate. On public expenditure, it would be inappropriate for me to say anything at this stage in the light of decisions which have yet to be taken by the Government. All I would say is that I fully recognise the deep concern expressed by many of my right hon. and hon. Friends about the need to work out a better system for local authority capital spending which so far as possible avoids the problems we have faced since I had to ask for restraint last July. I am very grateful to the overwhelming majority of local authorities which have agreed to abide by the terms of that restraint, but I am aware of the serious difficulties that it has posed for them. Given the prospective size of the cash limit breach, it was inevitable that some action had to be taken, and I am glad that we were able to stop short of a full moratorium.

The main local government debates of the Session will centre on abolition and rate capping. Those issues must be properly debated, and the debates will be fierce and no doubt controversial. But in the end let us all remember that we live in a parliamentary democracy where Parliament is the supreme authority. The rule of law, the will of Parliament, and the general common sense and temper of our people are the foundations upon which our system of parliamentary democracy and our civil freedoms rest. There may be some—very few—in local government who see their position as local councillors as a power base from which to challenge the will of Parliament and the rule of law. That is not the way. In all the debates during the coming months hon. Members on both sides of the House will wish to remember that.

4.24 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The House has just listened to a long speech based on one sentence in the Gracious Speech, which referred to local government reform, and I regret that the Secretary of State did not refer to the other sentence in the Gracious Speech, which dealt with his Department's responsibilities for the environment. They may be two brief sentences in the Gracious Speech, but they cover many highly controversial issues in local government and the environment, and I agree with the Secretary of State that the Bill to abolish the metropolitan county councils and the GLC will be the most controversial of this Session.

The Secretary of State said that people had doubted his commitment to that measure; it was not his commitment that we doubted, but any evidence for the measure or his wisdom in promoting it. He said that he hoped the issues would be fully debated in Parliament. We intend to ensure that that happens. I hope, therefore, that he will give us a guarantee that the measure will not be subject to a guillotine before it has been properly examined by the House.

We have just begun a new Session of Parliament, and it is clear from the Secretary of State's speech that Government policy on local authorities will be as malign and malevolent as ever. It will almost certainly be characterised by the incompetence, vacillation and double standards that we have seen during the past 12 months.

Unhappily for local government, the Secretary of State does not seem to recognise the importance of its role and functions and its contribution to the national well-being of our country and to our democratic institutions and processes. Those issues are fundamentally important to us, and will remain at the forefront of the political debate. Given Britain's chronic problems of unemployment, inadequate and, in many areas, declining infrastructure in public services, the special difficulties that are faced by urban communities and inner cities, the problems of the black and ethnic minorities, and of rural decline, it is impossible for the Opposition to accept what the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues propose: that in the face of all this, the role of local government should be a declining one.

It is also unacceptable to the Opposition that the dangerous and accelerating trend of the past five years of elected local councils becoming the controlled agents of a central bureaucracy should continue. Are we expected to live in a society where more and more powers are removed from democratically elected councils and given to non-elected unaccountable elites, as has happened in the administration of the Health Service, the water industry, transport and others such as the fire service and refuse disposal? That seems to be the fate of much of the work now being carried out by the metropolitan counties and the GLC.

Since 1979 local authority expenditure powers and the ability to make local decisions based on local needs and issues have been increasingly curtailed by this Administration. The Government have pursued, for political and philosophical reasons, an attack on local government expenditure; and associated with this has been a barrage of frequently repeated and often unsubstantiated assertions about overspending and profligacy. The language of political abuse has become familiar, and we heard much more of it again this afternoon. A cool and dispassionate examination of the position could not fail to rebut most of those assertions as nonsense. I emphasise again, in view of what the Secretary of State said about the Rates Act 1984, that there are no rational macro-economic arguments in favour of central control of that part of local government expenditure raised from revenue, whatever the source. There should be control of that part of local government expenditure provided by the Exchequer; few, if any, would question that.

Even if one accepts—I do not—the Government's arguments about overspending, it represents 0·7 per cent. of total public expenditure in 1984-85. The Rates Act is unlikely to make any significant difference to that, and in spite of what the right hon. Gentleman said it could make the situation worse for those authorities not designated. Although he talked about fairer targets, he did not remind the House that, as he is again reducing the total money available, those authorities will continue to be squeezed by his policy. That says nothing of the Treasury's windfall of more than £0·5 billion—£555 million—which it receives in clawback because of his penalty system. Ironically, the Treasury has a vested interest, through the failures of the present local government finance system, in allowing local authorities to overspend. It benefits as a direct result. That is one of the supreme ironies created by this Administration.

Frankly, the Government are aiming at the wrong targets, if indeed they are taking aim at all. The Secretary of State often seems to be shooting in the dark and hitting himself in the foot. Each time a semblance of an argument has emerged from his Department in support of existing policies, it has been obliterated by informed criticism and abundant evidence.

The right hon. Gentleman takes pride in the setting up of the Audit Commission by his colleagues. It said of the present financial arrangements:

"A detailed review of the present arrangements for grant distribution should be undertaken to devise solutions to the problems that this report has identified."

The right hon. Gentleman is apparently setting up an internal inquiry which will not take evidence or be open to the scrutiny of the professional bodies, the local government associations, individuals or political parties. In the face of all the evidence and criticism, that is absolutely unacceptable to the Opposition.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman may have misunderstood what I said. Of course we start with the internal study. Proposals will then be put forward on which there will be widespread consultations. That will be the point at which there will be an opportunity for people to comment and put their views forward. My right hon. and hon. Friends will be pleased to receive any proposals. Indeed, the local authority associations have already made it clear that they will put forward their proposals as part of the internal study. The first stage is the internal study, but before there is any question of legislation there will be widespread consultations. Changes of that magnitude deserve nothing less.

Dr. Cunningham: That is somewhat reassuring, but it is strange that the right hon. Gentleman should be insisting on coming forward with proposals before he has taken evidence from those so closely involved.

In local government today, after five years of Conservative rule, normal relationships have almost totally broken down. Massive and damaging changes have been inflicted on councils of all persuasions, major and substantial changes are being implemented even now, and after all that the right hon. Gentleman is setting up his inquiry. Many people in local government think that it is too little, too late.

At the Conservative party conference in Brighton the right hon. Gentleman talked about local councillors and the need to review their role and functions. Incidentally, if his review is carried out on an unbiased and open basis, I shall welcome it. However, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"What we need is a clear and dispassionate study not only of the abuses but also of those underlying changes which the abuses reflect".

If that is his view of how to approach problems, why did he not adopt the same approach before deciding to abolish the metropolitan counties and the GLC? Why was there no clear and dispassionate study of the issues involved there? His attitudes are damningly inconsistent, as are those of his ministerial colleagues. Only as recently as this week the Minister of State, Department of Transport said of a proposed GLC lorry ban:

"I would urge, as I have done repeatedly, if they decide to press ahead with the proposals that they first hold a public inquiry. This is the normal democratic procedure for subjecting major proposals like this to independent public scrutiny. Hundreds of people have asked them to hold an inquiry and I trust that they will heed those calls".

Is it really the Government's submission that an inquiry into a proposed lorry ban in central London is more deserving of proper investigation and consideration than the abolition of the authority which governs the affairs of our capital city? Is that what the right hon. Gentleman expects the House and the people to accept? It is unacceptable.

The Secretary of Stae for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cunningham: I shall in a moment. Why does not the Secretary of State for the Environment face the fact that, overwhelmingly, the evidence is against what the Government are proposing for the metropolitan counties and the GLC?

Mr. Ridley *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham: I shall give way in a moment. Why does not the right hon. Gentleman face up to the reality that in the metropolitan county and GLC areas the public are moving steadily in favour of Labour party policy and against what he is proposing? Why does he not face up to the fact that his own GLC colleague, councillor Robert Mitchell, who represents Wanstead and Woodford, recently said in *The Guardian*:

"London is the victim of a Tory deception".

The right hon. Gentleman's friend and colleague added:

"The alleged transfer of GLC functions to the boroughs to give the electorate more direct control is quite simply a deception".

We certainly agree with that, and so do most Londoners.

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for quoting the Minister of State in relation to the GLC lorry ban. If people are adversely and discriminatingly affected by matters such as a new road or a major planning application, the Government have no hesitation in allowing a public inquiry. Surely that is exactly on all fours with the GLC lorry ban. It is absolutely right and proper that there should be an investigation into that. That is not a matter of policy but is a question of individuals being adversely affected compared with others.

Dr. Cunningham: I do not dissent from anything which the right hon. Gentleman has said. We are in favour of such an approach, all the more so in respect of the elimination of elections and the removal of people's rights to elect authorities to govern their affairs.

Mr. Ridley *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham: I shall not give way again.

What I have said is even more the case when the matter has not been based on any inquiry, evidence or examination. This is a far more serious matter for millions of people. We are asking for some consistency from the Government.

Mr. Ridley: In that case, is the hon. Gentleman——

Dr. Cunningham: I am not giving way.

There is no evidence to support what the Secretary of State for the Environment is proposing, nor is there any evidence that public opinion, let alone the opinion of his Conservative colleague from Wanstead and Woodford, is on his side. It is claimed that these proposals return accountability to the people and powers to the boroughs, but there is no evidence to support that either.

Indeed, it now appears that, in their haste, the Government are moving into even further difficulties

[Dr. Cunningham]

because organisations such as the Greater London Enterprise Board, the joint police boards, the fire boards, and perhaps others will be involved, and there is a danger that the Bill may turn out to be a hybrid Bill. I hope, in spite of what the Secretary of State for the Environment said, that the Government's proposals for all these matters will be spelt out in detail in the Bill and not left to be subject to enabling powers at some later date. That would be an abuse of Parliament and of the procedures of the House.

The Government have produced no case for the abolition of the metropolitan counties and the GLC. Their original figures for savings have disappeared without trace, and even the Treasury — so we learn from documents leaked to *The Guardian* a few weeks ago— does not believe that any savings will result, unless there are major reductions in services and major job losses, in what the Treasury euphemistically describes as strict manpower control. The reality seems to be, as was pointed out in the inquiry and investigation instigated by the metropolitan counties and carried out by Coopers and Lybrand, that the Government's only effective options are to cut services, to raise rates, to disguise rate rises by so-called safety nets or to subsidise the boroughs in some other way.

In none of this can it be argued that powers are being returned to the electors or to the boroughs concerned. There will be no increase in local accountability. There will be more centralisation of control. There will be no saving of money for the ratepayers, and there will be no more effective delivery of services — the contrary is likely to be the case.

Even the London and south-east regional planning conference, much lauded by the Minister for Local Government, had this to say about the Government's proposals in a recent letter. Mr. B.T. Buckle, the secretary of the conference, said:

> "It has become clear that the principal effect of the proposal so far as planning is concerned would be to make the Secretary of State the strategic planning authority for Greater London but without the obligation to prepare an overall and detailed scrutiny through an examination in public."

So much for the claims about public inquiries. Mr. Buckle continues:

> "This would be an outcome which this conference would deplore."

Mr. Buckle is quite right.

The Secretary of State said little about services and jobs, and virtually nothing about housing. That is not surprising because in housing the Government's record is shameful and appalling. There is a real housing crisis. Some 78,000 households were accepted as homeless in England in 1983, and the figure has since increased. Over 1 million households are currently on local authority waiting lists in Britain. Over 190,000 households were living in overcrowded accommodation in 1983. Over 190,000 sheltered dwellings were still needed in England to meet the urgent needs of elderly people. Thousands of dwellings were needed for people who are disabled and unable to look after themselves physically. Over 1 million dwellings were unfit for human habitation. Over 390,000 houses lack one or more basic amenity. Over 500,000 houses required repairs costing more than £7,000. Over 2,500,000 dwellings required repairs costing up to £7,000 and over 1,500,000 million dwellings suffered from major design defects.

The crisis has been exacerbated by the annual reductions in the housing investment programme allocation, which is now down by 70 per cent. in real terms since 1978-79. It is a scandal. Ignoring inflation, for every £100 spent on public housing in 1974-75, only £65 will be spent in the current financial year.

The reality is that not only is this an appalling record, but it is increasingly recognised as such right across the spectrum—by the building and construction industry, by the Building Employers Confederation, by the Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors, by the Royal Institute of British Architects, by the National Council of Building Material Producers and even, this week, by the CBI. As the *Financial Times* said recently:

> "As business failures continue at record levels in this country, bankruptcies increased most steeply in the building and construction industry."

Those are the real measures of the Government's approach to building and construction.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: That criticism, coming from the hon. Gentleman, is a bit thick. Does he agree that, during the period of the last Labour Government, capital spending on housing was reduced by 45 per cent. and for the corresponding period of almost exactly the same number of years under the present Government, the figure was 17 per cent? There was more than twice as fast a fall under the previous Government as under this Government.

Dr. Cunningham: The reality is that, in spite of the right hon. Gentleman's protestations, when this Conservative Government took office, housing investment was more than double what it is now, after six years of this Administration. We learn to our dismay that even now talks are in progress about further substantial cuts, not only in building and construction, but possibly to the urban programme, which would have a devastating impact on those areas of the inner cities where stress is already at its highest.

Sadly, it is now apparent that racial harassment in housing is widespread, and on the increase. Black and ethnic community representatives, supported by the Commission for Racial Equality, are calling for legislation to compel housing authorities to protect those threatened. I ask the Secretary of State to examine those issues as a matter of urgency, and if he is unaware of the evidence, I shall write to him about it, because this is a matter for grave concern.

This summer witnessed a shortage of water for millions of people. There was no national water shortage, simply an inefficient industry and an infrastructure unable to cope with drought in certain regions. That occurred against a background of underspend of £110 million on construction in the water industry in the past two financial years. Can we have an assurance that the Government will learn the lessons of this failure and ensure that those who suffered will have a fairer deal? Incidentally, these people will also experience—to add insult to injury—a major increase in their water rates.

There is reference in the Gracious Speech to legislation to protect the environment. Urgent action to do something is desperately needed, as we have been telling the Government for many months. We call for an urgent review of the work of the Wildlife and Countryside Act,

and for a review of the operation and environmental impact of the energy industry, in particular of the nuclear industry.

We call for urgent action to reduce the impact of acidic precipitation on the environment. The Government should act with more vigour and urgency to protect our national heritage in the countryside from the increasingly malign impact of the agriculture industry. We must take action to halt the over-use — the abuse — of pesticides and fertilisers. Damage done to flora, fauna, topsoil and water courses is serious and increasing. The physical destruction of heaths, moorlands, marshes, meadows, wetlands, deciduous woods and sites of special scientific interest is appalling and should be halted.

The 1983 annual report of the Nature Conservancy Council said:

"There is just about enough habitat left to ensure continuity of Britain's wild plants and animals if it is conserved. The danger is that if it is not whole-heartedly protected now, in 10 years' time it will be too late."

The reality is that over 245 sites of special scientific interest have been lost, of which 156 have disappeared in the past 12 months alone.

The 1984 annual report of the Nature Conservancy Council says:

"The next 18 months could well determine the future for nature conservation in many parts of the country. There are at least some glimmers of hope in the greater public awareness and an Act of Parliament which, with minor amendment must bring great benefits. The greatest imponderable of all, however, remains whether the financial structures of agriculture can be reformed in a way that befriends nature conservation. Until this happens we remain gravely concerned and there is little time to set matters right."

That is a Government body which is rightly warning the House, the Government and the country of the urgency of such matters. We have said many times that the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 has failed and cannot combat the massive and often malign impact of the common agricultural policy on the British countryside.

I repeat my offer and that of my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark)—which I regret has not been taken up although it was first made months ago, publicly and privately, to Ministers — to begin discussions immediately to seek an agreed Bill to end the current widespread abuses of our natural heritage.

The impact of people on their environment is increasing too as mobility and demands for sport, recreation and leisure increase. They will continue to grow and so will pressure on the countryside. The Government's funding of the development of sport and leisure facilities should be increased to take account of that.

There are many other important issues. The Royal Commission was right to have doubts about the Government's intentions on the implementation of part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. We would like to see action on sea dumping, the disposal of nuclear waste and other related matters.

The reality is that over a period the Government have been carrying out a sustained attack on local councils. In propagating that attack they have not been concerned about the impact on services or jobs. That is at a time when many communities need more assistance; when unemployment is increasing; when it is now widely recognised that Britain's infrastructure is in decay; and when, perhaps more than ever before in the recent past, it is essential for us to have an infrastructure that will be of major benefit in helping to regenerate Britain's economy. At this time the Government give less support. They make cuts and intend to go on giving less and less support to those communities and people so grievously damaged by their policies over the past four or five years.

The Secretary of State's speech this afternoon and the proposals in the Gracious Speech, far from helping to correct those problems, seem, on all the evidence, likely to make them much worse. That is why the Secretary of State's speech and what is not included in the Gracious Speech are so regrettable.

4.54 pm

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) had enormous cheek when he suggested that health powers were being taken away from elected councillors and given to an elite. He may well have forgotten that the Labour party started that trend when it took responsibility for the hospitals from the London county council and created the National Health Service, but it suits him to be forgetful.

The hon. Gentleman also talked twice about the breakdown in relations between local and central Government. Yes, there has been a breakdown, deliberately engineered by those on the Left who have no interest in local government but only in confrontation.

The hon. Gentleman tried to compare the GLC's stupidity in trying to cripple London and lose jobs in restricting transport without a public inquiry with the Government decision to abolish the GLC. Doubtless the hon. Gentleman chooses to forget that to abolish the GLC was a general election commitment; that was the public inquiry endorsed by the British electorate.

It is significant that this afternoon, on a matter that is of major importance to the Labour party, there are fewer than 20 Labour Members on the Back Benches. *[Interruption.]* That represents about half the number of London Labour Members of Parliament.

Let me ignore the babblings from the well-known hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who threw out the previous Member for that constituency, Mr. Arthur Lewis, who had served the House remarkably well, and deal with two issues. The first is a purely local issue which affects Camden and Kensington and Chelsea in particular. A recently discovered loophole in the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 is being exploited by ruthless developers. I brought that to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues some 12 months ago. I expect an answer today on what my right hon. Friend proposes to do about schedule 8 of the Town and Country Planning Act. His officials have had more than enough time to come to a conclusion on that. If that abuse goes on unchecked, it will cost ratepayers millions of pounds or make local authorities give planning permission that will be wholly wrong. I look forward to an answer later tonight.

The second issue is a wider London issue. I hope that my right hon. Friend will issue a decision swiftly—I do not mind what it is—on the stolport. A lack of decision is costing a mass of money and a reopened inquiry would be a negation of democracy.

When we listen to Labour Members and those in London who object to the abolition of the GLC, it is important to give one's credentials for the abolition of the GLC. I served for 25 years in local government in London on a borough council as well as on the GLC housing committee as a co-opted member. I opposed the creation

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of the GLC. I resent those in this House and in another place, some even on the Conservative Benches, who believe that there is something wrong with abolishing the GLC and who equate abolition with the loss of democracy. I remind them that the boroughs are far closer to democracy than the GLC, or, indeed, the metropolitan councils.

I say to any of my right hon. or hon. Friends, who are no longer on the Front Bench, who represent London constituencies and who do not like what is being done that they had the opportunity to express their views to the London Conservative Members group. If they did not do that, we do not want to hear from them on this issue now.

I recall the campaign that was waged by the London county council against its own abolition. Indeed, on that occasion I gave evidence to the Royal Commission. It looked at all the facts some 20 years ago and there is no need for any further inquiries. On that occasion, the London county council, with a Labour majority, did not spend the ratepayers' money in the same way as the GLC is doing. Unlike the GLC, the old London county council did not indulge in an appalling campaign of lies, using a Goebbels-like technique. If one tells a lie often enough, and one tells a bigger and better lie every day, people will begin to believe that there is some truth in it. That is the view of the GLC.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: No, I will not give way.

The old London county council did not do that, for two reasons. First, Herbert Morrison would never have permitted it and would not have tolerated the Livingstones of this world in the London Labour party. Secondly, the London county council had a Labour party that was composed of honourable men and women who recognised the supremacy of Parliament and knew that ratepayers' money was not to be spent on political propaganda. Despite what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said today, I hope that he will clamp down on such expenditure and return to the position that I remember, and that he will recall from his local government days, when local authorities did not spend money on items which Parliament had not specifically authorised under statute.

Do we have to go on enduring the anti-police committees of the GLC, Camden and Islington? None of those authorities is a police authority because none of them is fit to be such. But those authorities still go on spending money and attacking the police. That money comes from the ratepayers. My right hon. Friend has not yet given the ratepayers much comfort in that regard. I hope that he will consider relating statutory functions to expenditure.

The Bill is soon to be published. I hope that it will come quickly and that it will cover such things as the enterprise board. There has been massive asset-stripping. Indeed, the GLC sold properties to that phoney body for peanuts. I hope that the situation will be rectified. However, if there is any danger of hybridity, perhaps a separate Bill should be introduced. The Greater London Enterprise Board is a wasteful body and it should not be allowed to get away with it. It is not directly elected and is, at the best of times, a pretty grim quango.

Mr. Tony Banks: It is also saving 2,000 jobs.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: It is clear that members of the GLC do not understand how the House runs. One day they may learn that the House believes in democracy, and that it and the other place settle what the law is to be. The minnows over the road will have to learn that lesson, and I hope that they do so sooner rather than later.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Will the hon. Gentleman reconsider his comments about the fitness of Islington council's police committee to discuss and decide on matters relating to the policing of its area? I am a co-opted member of that committee and I trust that he was not addressing his remarks to me.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I gave way to the hon. Gentleman because he respects the conventions of the House and stands up instead of talking from his posterior.

Islington borough council is not fit to be an authority that controls the police. If Islington decides to set up a police committee to work along the lines set out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, that is a different matter. But that is not what is being done by authorities such as the GLC and Camden.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Islington police and enlightenment committee, of which the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is a member, is itself the subject of police investigations?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I was trying to spare the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) that agony. It is quite clear that this legislation will be opposed——

Mr. Chris Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State is obviously quite confused about matters relating to the policing of the area that I represent. He is referring to one body, but the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) is referring to a completely different——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Gentleman has raised a point of information and not a point of order on which I can rule.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I respect the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, and I look forward with interest to reading his speech and seeing how he sets the record straight in his usual courteous way.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: There is a limited amount of time, and the hon. Lady can make her speech later.

Much of the Labour party's campaign has been fought not with Labour party funds but with those of the ratepayers. It has been run using a pretty low sort of public relations exercise. Public opinion polls are constantly being quoted. Yet another poster opposite this building tells us that 74 per cent. of Londoners do not like what the Government are doing. Apparently fewer than 20,000 Londoners have been asked their opinion in all the polls run by the organisation concerned. If I had to choose between those who had been polled and the several million who voted in London for more Tory Members of Parliament than at any time since the war, I know who I or anyone in his right mind would choose.

Londoners are being manipulated by such public opinion polls. My hon. Friends and I have received masses

of letters but precious few of them have been genuine. They have come from voluntary bodies that have been blackmailed by the GLC into protesting, and from people who have been scared into believing that they will lose their bus passes. That was one of the most wicked and deliberate lies to be perpetrated by the Labour party.

Yesterday we witnessed a phenomenon in the United States of America in which the silent majority spoke out in vast numbers in a clear repudiation of the vociferous outpourings of a tiny minority. It was also a repudiation of the media, who were out of touch with reality. The reality is that the public in America supported a view expressed by those who submit themselves to election and not by those who are paid to express a view which they never test personally with the voters. I believe that the same will be true in England, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may be certain that at the next general election the public will back what has been done only with the rider that it has been done a year later than it should have been.

5.8 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) deployed his case with his customary vigour, and I shall take up some of his points later. But first I shall concentrate on the commitment in the Gracious Speech to increased competition in the provision of local bus services.

The White Paper on which the Government's proposals are based, which was published last July, made a fair case for some change in the present arrangements. For example, it pointed out that the current system was devised 50 or more years ago and that patterns of life and transport needs have changed considerably since then. We must also recognise that, under the present arrangements, local authorities have little choice of operator and so cannot really judge whether the services that they are buying are the most efficient and the least expensive. We must also accept that the present arrangements give little encouragement to new forms of public transport or hire transport — for example, the use of minibuses and allowing taxis and hire cars to carry passengers paying separate fares.

Increasing competition does not necessarily mean doing away with all bus planning. To improve the efficiency and standards of bus services, cost-effectiveness must be combined with network planning. Scrapping all network planning in urban areas and letting buses wander wherever their fancy takes them will not necessarily lead to greater competition, improved efficiency, lower fares or better services. It might lead to operators competing on the profitable routes while they ignore the non-profitable routes. It is not feasible to have buses chasing along streets hunting for passengers in a competitive race or free-for-all.

The evidence on which the Government base their claim in the White Paper is limited. For example, the White Paper states:

"The changes resulting from deregulation in Devon have been rather limited in scale."

Of Norfolk the White Paper states:

"it is not yet possible to evaluate the overall savings in revenue support."

Only in Hereford have major benefits from deregulation been claimed, and they have been challenged by outside commentators.

At present, private operators undertake only about 8 per cent. of stage carriage mileage and carry only about 3 per cent. of passengers. Yet the White Paper produced last July proposes that 88 per cent. of stage carriage mileage should come under private operation and that later, if Greater London is finally included, about 100 per cent. should be privately operated. Surely it is sensible to have further trials and experiments before making such a major alteration.

It is possible to imagine other means of exerting commercial pressures on operators which allow for the overall planning of bus services to ensure a decent service for all. Arrangements for franchising bus services—for example, by making bus companies compete for networks, through tendering against specifications drawn up to meet particular planning problems or commercial criteria—would be a better way to increase competition and encourage innovation.

Many hon. Members are worried about the impact of the Government's proposals on the rural areas. Ministers may say that innovation and transition grants will be available, but such grants will not last for ever. Do the Government expect us to believe that it is feasible to switch financial responsibility to local authorities when local authority expenditure is under such unprecedentedly severe pressure? Such a proposition will not commend itself to many hon. Members of both sides of the House.

According to recent polling of hon. Members, a clear majority in the House fears that rural bus services will be undermined. In many rural areas the continuation of a bus service is the lifeline of the community. If the Government introduce legislation based on the White Paper, we shall examine it with great care. The Government's case is far from made out.

I turn now to the commitment to abolish the GLC and the metroplitan counties. The proposed legislation does not appear in a vacuum. It comes from the same team that produced the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, the Local Government Finance Act 1982 and the Rates Act 1984. If hon. Members did not like those, in a well-worn political phrase, they "ain't seen nothing yet!". Those three Acts have two things in common. They provide for a continuing centralisation of power away from local authorities towards central Government and they were produced under pressure. We are talking about legislation on the hoof, as the Government blunder from one problem to another.

The Government claim in the yellow document produced last July that they are

"firmly committed to carrying through their manifesto promise to abolish an unnecessary tier of local government and to produce a major transfer of power and responsibility to the London boroughs and the metroplitan district councils."

I endorse that aim. As a former London borough council leader, I believe that the primary unit of local government is the borough and the district. However, that is not the effect of the Government's proposed legislation.

Like the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) my eye lit on the article in *The Guardian* on Monday this week by Mr. Robert Mitchell, the Conservative member of the GLC for Wanstead and Woodford, who said clearly:

"The alleged transfer of GLC function to the boroughs to give the electorate more direct control is, quite simply, a deception."

That is the view of someone who is in a strong postion to see what is going on.

If the aim of the exercise is to give more power to the lowest local government levels, why are so many reserve powers being retained by the Secretary of State? Why, under the terms of the yellow paper, must the Secretary of

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State issue "regional strategic guidance" on planning? Why do authorities have to have regard to that strategic guidance? That is a massive shift of power to Marsham street, away from elected local authorities.

Why must the Secretary of State have

"reserve powers to take over the operation of urban traffic control systems if the districts are unable to make satisfactory arrangements"?

I cannot accept that traffic control and management can be imposed by civil servants in the centre of London on distant metropolitan districts. Waste disposal is a basic, bedrock function. Even to deal with that, the Secretary of State has a

"reserve power to establish statutory joint arrangements . . . if he is not satisfied that those made by the authorities voluntarily are adequate."

There is a steady, insidious shift of power away from local authorities to civil servants and Ministers in Whitehall.

My second criticism of the proposed legislation is that it is not carefully thought through. A wide measure of independent opinion deeply regrets that the Government made no attempt to make an independent analysis of the defects in the 1963 reorganisation in Greater London or the 1974 reorganisation in the provinces.

There may be a case for change. The GLC and the metropolitan counties may be far from perfect instruments. That is certainly my view and that of many others. There is a case for examination, change, reform or even replacement, but there is no case for the Government presenting us with a back-of-the-envelope commitment from their manifesto without any careful preparation or examination of what might follow from a simple and straightforward act of abolition. Proof of that is in the snowstorm of duplicated consultation documents issued from Marsham street as the Government discovered one practical problem after another which would flow from abolition. The Secretary of State told us today that the date for abolition is still firm—1 April 1986. He says that the GLC and the metropolitan counties will no longer exist after that date. But serious practical problems will flow from that tight time scale.

The Government plan to achieve enactment of the legislation by July or October 1985, depending on progress in this House and the House of Lords. That will leave about seven months for the changeover to be achieved. All the quangos will have to be established and staffed. Initial budgets will have to be prepared. GLC staff will have to be individually and collectively identified before deciding who will be transferred, and to where, and who will get the sack. GLC staff will have to be transferred to a number of new bodies. New office accommodation will have to be found. It will have to be rented or purchased within six months if the Government are determined to go ahead with their plan to sell off county hall.

Local authorities are computer-oriented. All the files, computer programmes, information systems, legal records and the rest of the paraphernalia will have to be made compatible with all the new authorities' systems. Those of us who deal with local authorities from day to day are constantly frustrated by the way in which the system is bureaucratically operated, and we are even more concerned about what will happen when we have the change that the Government propose. The Government are proposing to push through the abolition Bill without any time for a real examination of the practical problems. That is a recipe for chaos, confusion, disruption and bureaucratic muddle.

It is my view that the abolition Bill will not make local government simpler in the metropolitan areas and the Greater London area. In fact, it will have the reverse effect and will be a step in the wrong direction. That view is endorsed by both parties in the alliance. There is an important case for simplifying the local government system.

There is no evidence that what is being proposed will make councils more accountable to electors. The Bill will have the reverse effect because of the indirect nature of many of the joint boards and committees that will be involved. The Government's proposals will not stop the erosion of power and the steady drift of power away from town and county halls to central Government in Whitehall. In fact, the Government's proposals will accelerate that trend.

Lastly, there is still no sign that the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan counties will lead to any significant financial savings. On that basis, as on all others, we in the alliance will oppose the abolition Bill as vigorously as we contested the paving Bill in the previous Session.

5.22 pm

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): As a new member of this place of only just over a year's standing I find it curious that we should be discussing for the first time what the Government propose should take the place of the existing local government institutions in Greater London and the metropolitan counties. In effect, this debate is the first occasion on which Parliament has had the opportunity to discuss the Government's proposals.

On Second Reading of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Bill, as it then was, I complained that we were being asked to abolish elections without even knowing what the Government proposed should replace the GLC and the metropolitan counties. We now have the opportunity to discuss the Government's proposals, and we do so at a time when the ink is nearly dry on the Bill which is to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties. I ask the Government to take notice of the opinions that are expressed in this place. Many Members have considerable experience of local government and the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) is one of them. I hope that the Government will listen to the comments that are expressed in the Chamber on their proposals and be willing to modify them.

During our debates on the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Bill some of us voted in the middle of the night on various amendments and some of my hon. Friends and I found that Ministers objected to a number of our proposals. There was a handful of us in that position. The Government took no notice of our submissions until they were reinforced by a vote in another place. At that stage they made a complete turn-around and accepted them.

I urge the Ministers who are responsible for the abolition Bill to listen to the experience of this place when we come to discuss the Government's proposals following the introduction of the Bill. It should be borne in mind that the proposals were set out for the first time in a document which was published at the end of July. I do not accept the argument of the hon. Member for Woolwich that there has been deception. It is plain from reading the July document

that there are many functions, tasks and powers which the Government accept cannot be transferred to boroughs and which are not being transferred to boroughs. However, I accept the hon. Gentleman's claim that the effect of the proposals will be the taking by central Government of local government powers.

It is said that the object of the Government's proposals is to introduce streamlining. I accept that some streamlining could be effected by transferring functions which could be carried out by boroughs to the boroughs from the county councils. However, it makes nonsense of the concept of streamlining to transfer functions which cannot be carried out by individual boroughs and which are now being carried out by one body. Such functions should not be transferred to a mass of different bodies and authorities, some of them unelected and some of them established for completely different purposes. The object of streamlining will not be achieved by the proposals and the net result will be much more complicated residual powers than at present. In these respects the new proposals will lead to a system that is worse than the present one.

The Government have still not explained why they believe that the proposals will lead to reduced public expenditure. I have consistently supported the Government by voting for rate capping and other measures to control and limit public expenditure in central Government and local government. I support the Government's objective to control public expenditure but their abolition proposals will not achieve their objective. There is no evidence in the July document that they will lessen public expenditure or make it easier to control. Indeed, experience demonstrates that the opposite is the case.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) referred to the reorganisation of the National Health Service and the taking of powers from local authorities by the implementation of a previous Labour Government's proposals. Those proposals appeared in a Green Paper at the end of the 1960s. It was suggested that they would lead to possible savings in public expenditure.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: My hon. Friend is misquoting me. I referred to the creation of the NHS in 1946 and the measures which led to the London county council becoming the GLC.

Mr. Ground: I accept that correction but I do not think that my hon. Friend would say that those measures led to any great savings in public expenditure. Powers were removed from local authorities in the early 1970s by the proposals of a Labour Government but that led to no financial savings. It was argued then that streamlining would lead to savings and so the concept is not new to the present Government. The moves that took place in the early 1970s did not lead to the economies desired at the time. The Water Act 1973 has led to a substantial increase in expenditure rather than a reduction of public expenditure.

The Government's planning proposals represent an advance upon the proposals set out in the original White Paper. The idea of having a separate structure plan for every London borough was nonsense and has been abandoned. There is great force in the point made by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that, while recognising the need for strategic planning in London, the role of strategic planning, which has been the responsibility of the GLC, has, in paragraph 2.2.3 of the Department of the Environment document, expressly been taken over by the Secretary of State. If the Government are sincere—I am prepared to accept that they are—in their wish to keep powers within local authorities, and if the intention to take power centrally is not the objective of the legislation, then plainly further consideration of the planning proposals will be necessary.

The proposal to make the body responsible for historic buildings also responsible for conservation areas, as mentioned in paragraph 2.16.2, seems to be an extraordinary extension of the powers of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission. The designation and protection of conservation areas is a normal function of a local authority, and it is surely a more appropriate function to be carried out by an elected authority rather than an appointed authority such as the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission. I hope that I have understood the paragraph correctly—with its mass of semi-colons it is very difficult to understand—but that appears to be its meaning.

I think that the Government are being honest about the traffic difficulties. In the document produced by the Department of Transport, that Department is even more honest about the difficulties than is the Department of the Environment. It is plainly recognised that the work that the GLC is now doing will, in a substantial measure, have to be taken over by centrally organised initiatives, with a substantial role for central Government.

With regard to traffic management, it is specifically said in the document that borough and district councils will be given a statutory duty to consult other councils whose areas may be affected by their proposals for traffic management. It is also said that where any dispute cannot be settled by the parties themselves, the Secretary of State's consent will be needed before the proposal can go ahead.

It is recognised that there will be about 500 miles of roads in Greater London in regard to which traffic management policies will need to be considered on a comprehensive basis. That is a clear indication that the role and responsibility of the strategic authorities is not being passed to the boroughs. It shows the need for a new single body at least to carry out the residual powers which are not being delegated to the boroughs. It is not satisfactory that those powers should be taken over by joint boards or by non-elected bodies set up for different purposes. The better course would be to have a co-ordinating body, which is able to carry out the residual functions that are not delegated to the boroughs. As we have not yet invented a better method of doing it, I suggest that the co-ordinating body should be an elected one.

The experience of all the people I know who have served on joint boards or inter-borough committees—non-elected bodies to which people are nominated by local authorities—is that they are the most difficult bodies to run efficiently and well. Any hon. Member with any experience of local government will recognise the truth of that statement.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Member has mentioned something that is most significant to his own Front Bench. Will he agree that the very reason why the directly elected London county council was set up in 1889 was to replace the indirectly elected Metropolitan Board of Works in

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London, and that the Government are now proposing to take us back to the structure that prevailed in London prior to 1889?

Mr. Ground: There were also other reasons, such as fear of corruption and abuse in bodies that were not directly elected and directly responsible. I do not disagree with what the hon. Gentleman said.

There are many things wrong with the local government system, but they will be made considerably worse if what is proposed is made the normal way of dealing with functions left over from the reorganisation.

I ask the Government to listen to those within our party and outside it who are urging the need for a residual elected body to carry out the necessary functions openly and in a far more efficient way than any joint board or nominated committee could possibly do it. Such a residual body could also carry out the functions more economically, in a more cost-conscious way, and with a better sense of balanced priorities.

I find it extraordinary that the Government have accepted the case for direct elections to ILEA, for not transferring any of the school functions to boroughs, and have accepted the case for the permanence of ILEA. That is a very odd position by any criteria. I know that the new Minister of State had views about the disbanding of ILEA, and whether the powers could be transferred to local authorities. He should be encouraged to look at the question again and at the whole structure of education in London. Whatever the Government's feelings about the financial irresponsibility of the GLC, ILEA has at least been in contact with elected members who had to make some judgment of financial priorities over a range of services. An elected ILEA, with the sole responsibility for education, could be an even bigger headache to the ratepayers of London than an ILEA in close cahoots with an elected authority.

I support what the hon. Member for Woolwich said about the desirability of reviewing the structure of local government. Obviously, it cannot be done before the Bill is passed, but I urge the Government, as part of their posture, to review the operation of the boroughs. There are statutory ways of doing it. It is time that it was done, because they were set up in London 20 years ago and have not worked out as well as was hoped. When they were formed, it was hoped that decisions could be taken by members on policy, that members would remain active in their work, gain experience and be able to delegate the day-to-day running of the council to officers while remaining in touch with their electors. If one looks at the operation of any London borough—I am sure that it is true of many district councils—one sees that that has not worked out. The burden of being a London borough councillor is far greater than was anticipated in 1963. There has been a complete change in the type, and the professional and business background of people becoming councillors. There are many people who do nothing else but serve as councillors. That is not what was intended. It is questionable whether they have operated as effectively or as efficiently as was hoped.

Therefore, it is particularly important, when we are thrusting more powers upon the London boroughs, that we should look at the way in which those boroughs operate and see whether any improvements can be made in the way in which they operate and in which persons are attracted to the task of being councillors.

For those reasons I very much hope that the Government will look at those suggestions as well as those made by other hon. Members so that there can be discussion of the proposals rather than the locked-in confrontation in the debates that we had on the previous Bill.

5.41 pm

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): I agree with some of the remarks made by Conservative Members. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground), who put his case sincerely and obviously spoke from great knowledge of local government, especially in the London area. I agreed with most of what he said.

I should like to refer specifically to two sentences in the Gracious Speech. The first is:

> "Legislation will be introduced for the better protection of food and the environment."

I should like some undertakings from Ministers in respect of what that means. Secondly, I should like to refer to the words

> "Other measures will be laid before you."

That has a most ominous ring, and I should like some guidance on it.

Before referring to those two aspects of the Gracious Speech, I should like to make some observations on other issues that have been raised in the debate. The Secretary of State for the Environment referred to the privatisation of refuse collection. If he had given way to me I would have asked him to congratulate the Conservative-controlled Sefton metropolitan district council on going back on its original proposal to privatise its refuse collection. It received the lowest quotation from Grandmet, so it visited the London borough of Wandsworth to see the refuse collection service — or lack of service—provided there by Grandmet. Much is made of adhering to the law, but the council found the refuse collectors in Wandsworth breaking the law. They left vehicles with their engines running and unattended because that was the only way that they could collect the refuse according to the tender that they had submitted. The Conservative council in Sefton worked out that it would need not dustmen but supermen to collect the refuse if it accepted that tender, so it rightly rejected it, because the direct works system in that local authority, which has been considered Right-wing up to now, was considered to be effective and efficient. I should like to congratulate Sefton council even if the Secretary of State is not here to do so.

There is an argument about local government suddenly becoming so different in character—becoming political and spending money unwisely — that it justifies rate capping, central control and the abolition of councils that are behaving in that wicked manner. That argument is absolute nonsense. I have been in politics since I was 15 or 16. I was in local government and chaired the housing committee in the city of Manchester. I saw the city when it was Conservative-controlled. I saw the city of Liverpool when the Liberal-Tory alliance controlled it. There has always been politics in local government. There have always been political decisions and political propaganda campaigns run by local authorities.

The Secretary of State talks about councils spending money frivolously. When I first entered local government,

local authority after local authority—Tory or Labour-controlled—spent fortunes on conferences, receptions, junkets and all sorts of things. I remember Tony Crosland's famous speech when he said, "The party's over." It was made at Manchester town hall while he was tucking into an eight-course meal, and there were about 400 people there. All that has gone now. It is said that so-called Left-wing Labour councils spend money frivolously, but they have cut out all that nonsense in most cases. They are not wasting the ratepayers' money in such a way, although Conservative councils still do just that. Therefore, if the Government get down to that level and argue in support of massive proposals such as the abolition of the metropolitan counties and the GLC, we can reply in kind.

With regard to breaking the law, the great tragedy is that the Government are putting law-abiding citizens, many of whom have dedicated their lives to serving their fellow men and women, in a position in which they either break the statute law that requires services to be provided or defy the rate capping legislation. They are in a "Catch 22" situation.

When Liverpool city council was run by the Liberals and the Tories, they broke the law. They kept illegal lists of handicapped and disabled people who were waiting for telephones and adaptations. All that was illegal. Of course, present Ministers did not intervene. It was a Labour law that was being broken—the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act.

John Hamilton, the leader of Liverpool city council, a retired school teacher and justice of the peace, has never broken the law in his life, but now, because he wants to defend services to the elderly and the disabled and to protect education for children, he is being branded as a criminal by the laws that the Government are passing. What a state we are getting in, with central control of local authorities and legislation that forces the people in society who want to protect those in most need to face the dilemma of breaking the law. At the same time, unemployment is rising and it seems that lawlessness is not being dealt with effectively in the streets of Liverpool and Bootle, my constituency. Hard drug-taking seems to be increasing, which is a serious problem, yet we are told that the real criminals are people who want to defend services for those in greatest need. That is the society that the Government are creating.

In the Queen's Speech there is a suggestion that there will be legislation to protect the environment. Together with my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), I hope that there will be legislation to deal with the problem of acid rain. The Select Committee on the Environment has reported. We have not yet had the Government's response and a date has not been announced for a debate on that response and on the report itself.

I hope that the Government will change their attitude towards action on that issue and will not continue to mouth propaganda that seems to come from the Central Electricity Generating Board. The Select Committee's report shows that the weight of evidence is overwhelming. Emissions of sulphur from power stations and of nitrogen oxide from motor cars, power stations and industry are causing damage to rivers, lakes and forests not only in Scandinavia and West Germany but in this country. There have been reductions in sulphur and nitrogen oxide emissions in this country over the past few years, but we are still one of the biggest emitters in Europe, if not the biggest emitter, except for the Soviet Union.

If we wait for the conclusive proof which the CEGB—and, up to now, the Government—have said they want before they will take action, it may be too late. The damage done to lakes and forests in Scandinavia and to forests in West Germany should warn us that the cumulative build-up of emissions of sulphur and nitrogen will damage our environment. Damage is already being done, and the process will accelerate. We do not have the conclusive proof that the CEGB demands, but we have evidence similar to that which existed when we first began to realise that cigarette smoking caused lung cancer. Even if the evidence is not scientifically conclusive, it is overwhelming. Action must be taken and I hope that the Government will take it.

I believe that the CEGB figures are on the high side. The board suggests an increase of 10 to 15 per cent. in electricity charges over 10 years to retrofit all fossil fuel power stations. That means an increase of a maximum of 1 to 1·5 per cent. a year to save our environment, when electricity charges have risen by over 50 per cent. in the past four years. One must look at the problem in perspective. We must save British lakes, rivers and forests before they are damaged as the European and Scandinavian forests have been.

I am worried about the phrase

"Other measures will be laid before you."

At the Conservative party conference this year the Minister for Housing and Construction announced that new legislation was planned for the private rented housing sector. There is no mention of such legislation in the Queen's Speech. Is it included in the phrase "other measures" or has the idea been dropped? I fear that legislation by a Conservative Government in the private rented sector would involve an attempt to undermine even further the security of tenants who rent from private landlords, and another attempt to bolster the private rented sector.

Those who receive the worst treatment in housing terms are those who rent from private landlords. We do not need legislation to weaken the security and the rights of private tenants in an attempt to revitalise the private rented sector, which will inevitably die anyway. We need legislation to provide more security, to get rid of bogus holiday lets, to deal with the bed and breakfast hotel scandals and to end the use of licences to avoid giving security to those who rent from a private landlord. The worst housing conditions are concentrated in the private rented sector. There are severe problems of disrepair. There is much harassment, many illegal evictions, and rents are high. If any legislation is in view, I hope that it will be designed to protect the tenant rather than further to undermine his position. I hope that the Minister will tell us whether the promise made to the party conference has been dropped or whether there is to be another attack on those in the greatest housing need.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland has said, the Secretary of State for the Environment failed to make any mention of the housing crisis which is developing apace. By the time of the next election, we shall be facing a housing crisis of 1945 proportions. The issue of the sale of council houses will have disappeard as a vote winner for the Conservatives or a vote loser for us—if that is what it was. One cannot oppose what has already been

[Mr. Allan Roberts]

done and, in any case, with the lengthening waiting lists and other problems, the housing crisis will make housing a priority issue in the next general election. That can only benefit the Labour party, and make plain the need for the policies that we will suggest to deal with it.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): The hon. Gentleman says that what is done is done. Is the Labour party withdrawing its threat to force council tenants who have brought their homes to sell them back to the council?

Mr. Roberts: There never was such a threat. The Conservatives were guilty of amazing misrepresentations during the general election, on the doorsteps and elsewhere, about the Labour party's attitude to the sale of council houses. It is said that we lost votes over the issue, and that, because of it, many people voted for the alliance rather than for us. However, the policy on the sale of council housing in the alliance manifesto was exactly the same as that of the Labour party. Our position has always been the same as that of the Liberals and the Social Democrats. We are in favour of local authorities determining for themselves, as democratically elected bodies, whether they sell council housing.

If all the best houses have been sold off after nine to 10 years of council house sales, and if the housing crisis has worsened and waiting lists have lengthened, we shall be in a completely new ball game. The promises of the Labour party to help those in housing need will be seen to be far more relevant than any gimmicks that the Conservatives may use, in the run-up to the next general election, to bolster the figures for houses sold.

The Minister declined to go into any details about the possibility of further cuts in the housing budget. Recent newspaper reports have suggested that the Treasury wants cuts of £600 million or more in housing investment in the next financial year. That would be a disaster. It would drastically affect the construction programmes of both the local authorities and the housing associations—although the local authorities are likely to be worst hit. Councils and housing associations are committed to spending on work in progress. New work planned for next year would, therefore, be hard hit. It has been suggested that the number of council homes started could fall by 20,000. Improvement grants would probably dry up completely. In my constituency there are no improvement grants anyway and no new capital expenditure on housing, because the Conservative Sefton council has interpreted the Minister's request for voluntary restraint as a request for a moratorium, even though the Minister said that it was not. If there is a cut of £600 million, home owners will certainly not be able to get improvement grants. That will prove that Conservatives are not—as they claim to be—the supporters of the home owner.

One must consider the proposed cuts in terms of the present housing situation. In 1983 there was a total waiting list of 1·2 million—the highest total ever. There was a transfer list of nearly 600,000. An analysis by Shelter shows that in many areas the reduction in council house building is reducing the number of lettings available to dangerously low levels. In England alone, 78,000 households were accepted by local councils as homeless in 1983, compared with 53,000 in 1978. In London, Shelter found that over 2,000 homeless families were living in bed and breakfast hotels on a temporary basis last summer. The cost of such accommodation in London alone is estimated at £12 million a year—a sum which would be enough to pay off loan charges on 3,000 houses at an estimated cost of £30,000 each.

According to the Government's own housing conditions survey, 1·1 million houses in England were unfit for human habitation in 1981. Nearly a million homes lacked one or more basic amenities. Nearly 4 million homes needed repairs which would cost more than £2,500—a figure which had risen by over 20 per cent. in five years. That is the situation before the consequences of the £600 million cut mooted by the Treasury are felt. The greatest number of homes needing major repairs were in the owner-occupied sector. No money or grants for them are coming from the Government.

The housing stock is aging. According to estimates, in 1971 1·8 million homes were over 100 years old. By the turn of the century, that number will have risen to 4·3 million. That points to an increasing demand for repair and improvement, and hence an increase, not a reduction, in the moneys available. That is not just council housing, it is money provided through local authorities to housing associations and owner-occupiers.

The Housing Defects Act 1984, which the Government are planning to bring into operation on 1 December, designates as defective 170,000 homes built using precast reinforced concrete. Cuts will undermine efforts to deal with the problem in those homes, which the Government have recognised. In addition, the Minister for Housing and Construction announced just two weeks ago that all houses and flats built using large panel systems similar to Ronan Point are to be investigated for possible defects. Defects in some large panel types, for example Bison, have already been admitted. Shelter has estimated that that could mean that upwards of 100,000 dwellings could need repair or demolition. Cuts will clearly undermine repair programmes and in extreme cases there will be a possible risk to safety.

Cuts are economically unsound. There is no sound economic logic for cutting further or for not expanding the housing investment programme. The Treasury is insisting on cuts because, contrary to most accepted accounting conventions, it treats borrowing for capital spending as the same as borrowing for current spending. It is Treasury nonsense, but that is what it does with the public sector. In other words, the Treasury does not recognise capital investment. Its approach to spending on housing has been illustrated as follows—if someone buys a house with a £20,000 mortgage and pays £2,000 in mortgage repayments during the first year after purchase, any sensible person would say that during that year a liability of £20,000 has been created and payments of £2,000 have been made. The Treasury says that £22,000 has been spent, and that there must be further cuts. It does not apply the same logic to the private sector, the owner-occupier, the bank or the insurance company.

Construction is estimated to be one of the cheapest ways in which public spending can create jobs. For every £100 million invested in house building and home repair work, up to £175 million returns to the Exchequer by way of increased payments of taxes and reduced social security payments. Looking at that another way, cutting £600 million from the housing investment budget could mean a net saving to the Treasury — because of the unemployment created—of as little as £150 million.

I ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to fight his corner to obtain some money for investment in capital expenditure on housing so that we can build houses for the homeless and for those in most need, and provide jobs for people who work in the construction industry.

If the Secretary of State wants to find any savings on houses, and if he is forced by the Treasury—because most of the local government and housing legislation we have from the Department of the Environment is Treasury legislation rather than local government or housing legislation—to find some money, let him turn back on the Treasury and consider the amount of money that is given in income tax relief to owner-occupiers at the higher end of the scale who are buying large houses.

We have a system of housing subsidy based on income tax relief on the interest paid on the mortgage which is founded on the unassailable British principle that the richer one is the more help one needs with housing. If we study the figures, we find that they are amazing. The latest year for which comprehensive figures are available is 1983-84. The total value of mortgage interest tax relief amounted to £2,710 million, representing £400 subsidy per mortgagor receiving tax relief. The total council house subsidy, including Exchequer subsidies and net rate fund contributions to local authority housing revenue accounts in the same year came to £1,091, million representing only £188 per local authority dwelling.

I am not opposed to income tax relief for the average mortgagor but I support equal treatment for everyone in every form of tenure in terms of Government financial assistance and subsidy. If further cuts have to be made, perhaps some of the money can be taken from the top end of the owner-occupier market. I hope that the Minister will consider that, rather than a further attack on local authority and housing association subsidies and house building programmes.

I am sure that the gap that exists between subsidies that the owner-occupier and the council tenant receive will have widened even further with higher interest rates in 1984-85 and decreased Exchequer subsidies and rate fund contributions to local authority housing accounts.

Although the reply will be made by the Secretary of State for Transport, I hope that it will cover some of the omissions in the Queen's Speech and in the speech of the Secretary of State for the Environment when he opened the debate.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the next speaker, may I remind the House of what I said earlier? Many hon. Members wish to take part today and it would be helpful if speeches were not over-long.

6.5 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): In welcoming the Gracious Speech, I shall address myself to two specific matters. On the face of it, the abolition Bill may not appear to affect or interest a Member such as myself representing a district within a shire county. However, I welcome it for two reasons. First, it recognises the principle of a single-tier structure for local government, eliminating the duplication entrenched in a two-tier format, and that I heartily applaud. Both sides of the House, if pressed — the spokesman for the alliance agreed—would opt for the simplest system closest to the electorate affected.

Secondly, although it does not say so, the Queen's Speech recognises that the House got it wrong in the early 1970s. The Conservative party was in government at that time, but although all parties were agreed that something ought to be done, few people could agree on what. It is a little like the controversy over rates.

It seems sad that we politicians find it hard ever to say that we were wrong. There is no shame in doing so. In industry, the top people are those who can quickly recognise a wrong turn and respond accordingly. I have raised the matter because of the hypocrisy of the Labour party in general and in our city of Nottingham in particular. That Labour party, using its control of our city council, seeks to support in every possible way, the Labour party's campaign to retain the upper tier of local government in the metropolitan areas while it presses me and my two Nottingham colleagues to assist it in taking back its county borough powers lost in the same early-70s reorganisation. The Labour party is completely devoid of principles in this matter.

The second issue is the White Paper on buses and what is said in the Gracious Speech about the direction that the Bill might follow. Much hysteria has been whipped up which, unless the Secretary of State has in mind that which was not in the White Paper, is completely unjustified, counter-productive, and in some cases rightly branded as unprofessional. Some of the papers seem to be saying, "Damn the public; our empires are at stake."

The Queen's Speech stated:

"A Bill will be introduced to increase competition in the provision of local bus services in Great Britain and to transfer to the private sector the operations of the National Bus Company."

I support the floating of the National Bus Company in the hope that the Minister intends, first, that it should be broken up, and secondly, that any steps to further competition in the urban areas, such as Nottingham, will not predate that break-up or its privatisation.

Secondly, in an attempt to introduce competition for the greater benefit of a greater number of passengers—the passengers must surely be our prime concern — the Secretary of State will seek to ensure that such competition is fair and equitable and that proper public protection will be adequately provided and enforced. To achieve that, I believe that a new wholly-owned municipal PLC must be able to operate in a manner no more commercially constrained than existing or future limited or PLC operators. It should not be bound by local government or public sector financial control.

I believe that the White Paper uses the term "deregulation" — wrongly, in my view, because it actually means a different, fairer and, one hopes, more growth-oriented form of regulation. People do not want what are emotively described as cowboys or pirates with unsafe vehicles whose drivers do not meet the required standards—for example, in the number of hours worked per day—bringing a short-term, superficial gain which may then disappear, leaving people worse off. I hope, therefore, that the Bill will follow the recommendations in the White Paper and substitute quality control for quantity control. The quantity aspect will then look after itself. That quality control will require not just legal teeth but administrative enforceability. I hope that the Bill will not be vague about that.

If the new licensing authority is to concentrate on quality and enforcement, I hope that there will be a recording or co-ordinating body—perhaps a county or

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regional group of districts—because if local authorities are to respond as the White Paper suggests to social route provision and support, someone needs to know who is doing what, where and when.

I conclude by saying, even in the absence of the Leader of the Opposition, that I am one of those ordinary folk who, after a stint in local government, have found themselves privileged to be in this place. That stint in local government seems to have given this newcomer and many others a sounder base for their views than all the platitudes that the right hon. Gentleman's Celtic charm can dream up.

6.12 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan counties will surely be the most contentious issue of this Parliament, yet it rates just 16 words in the Queen's Speech. It received a few more in the Conservative manifesto of 1983, but even adding them all together those few words are devoid of both principle and intellect and, I believe, typify the Government's contempt for local democracy.

We are about to witness a fundamental change in the structure of local government, not as the result of a Royal Commission studying the situation for some years, as preceded the setting up of the GLC in 1964, nor as the result of a distinguished commission such as that which preceded the setting up of the metropolitan counties in 1972, but as the result of party political dogma, especially on the part of the Prime Minister. Abolition of the GLC was conceived by the Prime Minister in malice and spite and is now being nourished on ignorance and paranoia.

The Bill to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties will be an ugly, brutish creature which I believe will ultimately consume its own creators. Indeed, abolition has already guaranteed the political end of the Secretary of State for the Environment — the Tory party's equivalent of the vicar of Bray. He now holds office merely because his immediate removal would be an admission of defeat by the Prime Minister, but everyone in the House recognises that he is finished. Indeed, he has had to suffer the ultimate insult and indignity of someone else being brought in to do the job in which he has conspicuously failed. That person is the new Minister for Local Government, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker). His quaintly-named constituency leads one to think of him as the mole of Marsham street. Thinking of "The Wind in the Willows", I wondered who was Ratty—probably they all are by now, in view of the job that they are expected to do. If one is permitted to mix fairy tales, there is certainly no doubt as to who would be the Mad Hatter.

The Minister for Local Government has a reputation for being clever and rather smooth. I am sure that he would make the same assessment of himself. In 1977, before doing a swift bunk out of London to represent Mole Valley, he edited an interesting pamphlet. Its title, "Maybe it's because we are Londoners", was scarcely original but the pamphlet contained views which make very interesting reading today. Indeed, when I discussed it with Ken Livingstone the other day—[HON. MEMBERS: "Name dropping."] Yes, I believe in a bit of name dropping from time to time. Mr. Livingstone said that the Minister's pamphlet read rather like the GLC manifesto in 1981, as indeed it does. I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on the foresight that he used to have.

On planning, the right hon. Gentleman wrote in 1977:

"It will be generally agreed that Greater London, an area of some 610 square miles containing seven million people, must continue to be more than an agglomeration of 32 boroughs with different degrees of urban disease."

That was in the GLC manifesto and we say "Hear, hear" to that. He continued:

"The strategic role of the GLC should be enhanced".

That view was shared by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

On transport, the new Minister for Local Government wrote:

"The real benefits of the transport system can only be obtained by using the full range of facilities in a co-ordinated way. There is a tremendous job of work to be done in this area by County Hall."

He further stated:

"The policy of restraining heavy lorries should be extended as quickly as possible".

The Secretary of State for Transport should think about that before suggesting that the GLC is merely trying to clog up London. The Minister for Local Government expressed that view in 1977 and the lorry ban was included in the 1981 GLC manifesto.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): The hon. Gentleman may recall that the same pamphlet suggested that the Inner London education authority should be abolished. Does he agree with that, too?

Mr. Banks: I shall be coming to that, as it shows how inconsistent the Minister is.

In 1977, the right hon. Gentleman even had a good word for cyclists. He wrote:

"It is recommended that a purposeful campaign is mounted to make life safer and easier for them. Both the GLC and the boroughs should provide a proper pattern of cycle lanes and paths in inner and outer London."

That, too, was in the GLC manifesto. Indeed, cyclists and cycle lanes will be major casualties if the GLC is abolished.

On housing, the new Minister said:

"The GLC should excercise strategic control only. Zoning densities, plot ratios and high buildings should remain GLC responsibilities."

He called for the GLC to remain responsible for regional parks such as Lea valley, Colne valley, the M4 linear, and Hampstead heath.

In 1977 the Minister even described the City of London as an anomaly in the pattern of London's local government. Very few Labour Members would disagree with that. Indeed, the Conservatives should remember that the wind of abolition can blow in many directions. I trust that the next Labour Government will not only abolish the City of London as the anomaly that the Minister recognised it to be but will talk about true unitary local government and get rid of the shire counties, as consistency would demand if the metropolitan authorities are abolished.

The Minister went on to call for the GLC to have a role in tourism, race relations, employment and training—all of which it now does and for which it is bitterly criticised by Conservative Members.

The Minister's best contribution was the section on the relationship between Whitehall and county hall. He said:

"In recent years there has been increased direction by central Government over local government. Far from the GLC being

allowed greater independence Whitehall has, quite wrongly, interfered more and more with the activities of County Hall. The Government failed to approve the GLDP for too long, leaving a continuing vacuum in both strategic and local planning. It is impossible to have a proper strategic authority in Greater London without a change of attitude in Whitehall."

Why does the Minister appear to disagree with what he said then? What has changed his mind in seven years? What has changed the minds of the authors of the pamphlet "Maybe it's because we are Londoners" — the hon. Members for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), for Chelsea (Mr. Scott) and for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend)? Perhaps the real hon. Member for Mole Valley will stand up.

In 1977 the Minister called for the dismantling of the Inner London education authority. That is totally at variance with present Government policy. Having read what the Minister wrote in 1977, I cannot believe now that he is insufficiently intelligent to see that the abolition of the GLC makes no sense in economic, social or local government terms. It makes no sense that of all the problems that we face — mass unemployment, the destruction of our manufacturing base and the coal dispute in its ninth month—the Government seek to tie up this Session with an absurd, irrelevant piece of legislation to abolish the GLC and metropolitan county councils. All thinking hon. Members must realise that.

The matter is not even popular among the electorate —at least the London electorate. Recent opinion polls show that 74 per cent. of Londoners are opposed to the abolition. In 1983 the Prime Minister no doubt thought that the abolition would be the domestic equivalent of the Falklands factor, but a GLC factor is now much in evidence in London politics. The Tory party is losing council by-elections all the time, if not to the Labour party, then to the alliance. The GLC factor was apparent in the London results in the recent European Community elections. It is also seen in the general political attitudes of Londoners. The most recent MORI poll showed that, although the Labour party was, regrettably, 6 per cent. behind the Tory party in the country as a whole, it was 13 per cent. ahead in London. That was confirmed by a later Harris poll that showed the Labour party 18 per cent. ahead of the Tory party in London. If that were translated at a general election, 33 London Tory Members would lose their seats. In other words, the Government through its abolition policy will be signing the political death warrant for those hon. Members — but that in itself is not something with which I would disagree.

The Minister said that there would be savings. Where are they to come from? In the recent London debate between the new Minister for Local Government and the leader of the GLC, the Minister said that savings figures would be produced in two weeks, but they are still awaited. The Government must prove their point. The House is entitled to know what the savings will be and how such figures were reached. Our calculations at county hall show that savings can be achieved only by cutting services. The Government must come clean. If services are maintained after abolition, 25 of the 32 London boroughs will pay higher rates.

In that same debate the Minister said that power would be returned to the boroughs. He should brush up his knowledge of London local government. The powers that he is proposing to pass to the London boroughs have never previously been exercised by them. The Herbert Commission report of 1960 examined the devolution of all possible powers to the boroughs, made some recommendations, and left a core strategic role to the GLC which has existed to the present day.

The Minister also said that £535 million from GLC services would pass to the boroughs. He relies on a bold assertion and makes no attempt to back it up with facts. We want his evidence. If he speaks in the debate, I should be interested to know how he arrived at the figure. My calculation shows that 15·7 per cent. of ILEA 1984-85 net expenditure will be devolved to the boroughs. If ILEA is excluded from that calculation, 30·9 per cent. of the GLC 1984-85 net expenditure will go to the boroughs—just one third of the services' figure in monetary value terms. I have the figures worked out, because county hall has nothing to hide. The Government must put their facts before Londoners and the House.

It is a fact that the overwhelming bulk of submissions in response to "Streamlining the Cities" were opposed to the Government's proposals. It is a fact that most informed opinion inside and outside local government in the private and public sectors is against abolition. It is a fact that the overwhelming majority of Londoners are opposed to abolition. Who, then, is in favour of abolition except for the Prime Minister and the unthinking majority on the Tory Benches?

The abolition issue will not end either in this House or in the other place. It will run right through the 1986 London borough elections. It will result in massive gains for the Labour party and the destruction of the Conservative party in London local government. There is no chance that abolition will be achieved by 1986. Therefore, the chaos that will continue thereafter will run to the general election of 1987 or 1988. The right hon. Lady may not be for turning, but her environment Ministers are spinning like tops. They have all sacrificed their former well-held views, and none more obviously than the right hon. Member for Mole Valley. They have also sacrificed their self-respect and political credibility. That is all being done to save the right hon. Lady's face. All those who are honest know that abolition makes no sense in local government or economic terms.

It is doubtful whether the promise to abolish the GLC actually won the general election for the Prime Minister. The abolition of the GLC will undoubtedly contribute significantly to the Prime Minister's defeat at the next general election. That is the GLC factor, and Tory Members, especially those who represent London constituencies, should think carefully about that before they vote for their own political extinction.

6.28 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I shall not follow the road of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) because I am one ratepayer in the Greater London council area who wholly approves of its abolition. I pay as high rates for my modest flat in Kennington as I do for my reasonably-sized house in Bournemouth. If there is one cause of high unemployment in London — the figure for unemployment no longer appears on county hall — it is high rates. That is one good reason why the GLC should be abolished. It has proved itself to be irresponsible and unnecessary.

I welcome everything in the Queen's Speech. Clearly the proposals represent another heavy programme of legislation about which my hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. David Atkinson]

Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Stokes) complained yesterday. Most of us have sympathy with his warning that the House and the Civil Service will once again be under strain because of it.

The Government were elected to reverse the direction towards corporatism and state Socialism which previous Governments took during the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, by 1979, one saw with alarm that, of the 10 preconditions suggested by Karl Marx as being necessary for the establishment of a Communist state, seven had already been satisfied in Britain. Labour Members should look at page 555 of volume 8 of the collected works of Karl Marx to check that list. To reverse the process requires much new legislation before the Government can assume a lower profile that will allow people to enjoy much more of what they earn without interference from the state. No Conservative Member could complain about that.

Mr. Ridley: Why should we take any notice of an elderly imported German?

Mr. Atkinson: Unfortunately, that elderly imported German was involved in the textile industry in the Manchester area, which has still to be revived.

I welcome the broad reference in the Queen's Speech to the continued policy of privatisation, or more competition, as the Prime Minister likes to describe it. With most of our energy industries, the railways, steel, coal and shipbuilding still in state ownership, there is plenty of scope for denationalisation. The potential for the privatisation of the National Health Service remains almost completely unrealised. Unfortunately, there was no reference in the Queen's Speech to encouraging the demunicipalisation of local government services, although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made some welcome references to that this afternoon.

The welcome exception to that was the proposal to increase competition in local bus services. The White Paper on buses has aroused much opposition among some local authority bus operators and the unions. We now see much unjustified propaganda and misinformation which is reminiscent of the propaganda put out by the unions during the passage of the Telecommunications Act 1984, and which is designed to cause unnecessary concern and alarm especially to the elderly, who rely on their local bus services, particularly in outlying areas.

In hindsight, it might have been preferable to have published a Green Paper—a consultation document—on the Government's proposals, or at least to have allowed more time for consultation than was allowed, with the publication of the White Paper at the end of July, just before not only the House but local councils went into recess. We must await the Bill to learn how existing bus services, which the private sector will not touch because they will never be profitable, will be protected. However, the White Paper states clearly that local authorities will be able to continue to subsidise services that would otherwise cease. That commitment in the White Paper has already been overlooked by local authorities and by the trade unions, which believe that their members will be affected.

It is completely wrong to assert that a bus service will cease as a result of the proposals in the White Paper. It may take some years for the private sector to develop, because the present municipal bus monopolies discourage the participation of any tangible private sector expertise, but no one should underestimate the ability of private enterprise to produce a range of practical and flexible services that will offer passengers a wide choice of routes at competitive prices which will no longer be a burden to ratepayers or to taxpayers.

Until we try to put our bus services out to competition, we shall never know what the passenger will gain. I look forward to a revitalised local bus service, with new businesses and new jobs emerging as a result of the Government's proposals.

Earlier I expressed my disappointment that there was no direct reference in the Queen's Speech to measures requiring local authorities to privatise their services, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State helped to put that right in his speech by promising action to secure more competition, with a consultation paper to come and a hint of legislation during the next Session. I wholeheartedly welcome that, because the potential for savings in local government costs through privatisation is great, although it remains largely unappreciated and unrealised, with the result that small businesses in Britain are missing out on exciting opportunities which their counterparts abroad have long enjoyed.

Only about 31 councils from a total of 550 local authorities have contracted out some services. They have been restricted to refuse collection and to the cleaning of streets, public toilets and schools, although some authorities have shown a willingness to innovate by inviting tenders for services such as golf course management, grass cutting, pest control and school catering. Those examples have shown dramatic savings in existing costs, which have been passed on to the taxpayer. We often hear cited the example of the pioneering Southend borough council, which was the first to introduce the privatisation of refuse collection. As a result, it now saves £500,000 a year, which represents a ½p rate to Southend ratepayers. They enjoy a more efficient service, and the previous local authority employees are happier now with better working conditions, pay, holidays and job satisfaction.

After nearly three years' experience of the handful of courageous Conservative councils that had the foresight and the guts to explore the advantages of competitive tendering, it is a public scandal that more than 90 per cent. of local authorities have done nothing in this respect. Had every refuse-collecting authority done what Southend did, the nation would be saving about £200 million a year. When one analyses the activities and functions of local government, there is little that cannot be franchised that is not already being done by local councils using private firms to supply municipal services under contract somewhere in the western world.

I was delighted to learn that the Government are turning their attention to the demunicipalisation of local government as a matter of urgency. Perhaps as a first step my right hon. Friend will consider issuing a circular to all local authorities, similar to that sent to health authorities about a year ago, asking them to submit plans to seek competitive tenders for specified services and to explore the scope for others. There is no reason why such tenders should not be sought or submitted from European companies, because the European Community is about a common market in services as well as in goods.

The Conservative councils that have not put their services to the test of competition stand to be condemned

by the Conservative party for ignoring the key element of our philosophy, which remains prominent in the legislation heralded by the Queen's Speech.

6.39 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I shall follow the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) in one respect, in that I wish to talk about issues other than the abolition of the metropolitan counties. That is not because I have no sympathy with London Members but because I have no personal interest in such abolition. However, I assure my hon. Friends the Members for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) that during the long nights this winter I shall be trooping through the Lobby with them, because I support them in their fight to retain democracy. I am sure that they will be prepared to support hon. Members who represent other areas, particularly the depressed regions, when they fight for their democracy.

As I understand it, my hon. Friends' opposition to the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan counties is based on the democratic argument that it is wrong to abolish a tier of local government because that removes democratic rights from the people who live and vote within those areas. An equally fatal and perhaps more insidious way of attacking democracy is the way in which the Government have approached local government generally. They have mounted a two-pronged attack. On the one hand they have enforced a whole range of new controls on local government, and on the other they have reduced resources to local councils, even though such resources are absolutely essential if those councils are to attempt to meet the needs of the people they represent. That two-pronged attack is at least as insidious in its effect on democracy.

During the last three years, the Rhymney Valley local authority has lost £70,000 per 1,000 people in rate support grant. Those Conservative Members who represent more affluent areas may appreciate the problems which that local authority faces. In 1982-83, the Rhymney Valley district council received £66,000 per 1,000 people in rate support grant. The following year that was reduced to £56,570. In Wales as a whole, the amount went down from £277,671 to £285,811 per 1,000 people. That is not a reduction in cash terms, but when inflation is taken into account it is a very real drop.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) referred to the impact which capital expenditure on housing can have on employment. I am conscious of the impact which the reduction in capital expenditure has had on employment levels in Wales. In 1981-82, capital expenditure by Welsh local authorities was £249·7 million. In 1982-83 it was £349 million, and in 1983-84 it was £408 million. That is an increase in absolute terms, but when inflation and the increasing needs of our communities are taken into account, it is a serious reduction.

In 1983-84, Rhymney Valley district council received £6,752,000 in cash grant from central Government. In 1984-85, that will go down to £5,731,000—a reduction of 15 per cent. That is the problem now faced by all local authorities, but the impact of such reductions falls particularly heavily on areas such as Wales, with its traditional problems such as unemployment.

There is a twofold impact on local communities. Local councils are unable to meet the proper demands placed upon them by their communities. I intended to quote some figures in respect of housing need in the valley which I represent. They were prepared by the local authority's chief housing officer, who sent me a copy of the housing strategy and investment programme. Other hon. Members will be aware that similar programmes are being drawn up in their own constituencies. One phrase leapt out of that strategy document. It stated:

"it can only indicate the scale of the housing problems in the District and quantify the degree to which the Council will be unable to solve them unless there is a significant increase in the financial resources available".

Local authorities are now saying, "We cannot even plan. We can do nothing but indicate the scale and nature of our problems. Unless central Government are prepared to ease the burden and make additional resources available, we can do nothing but quantify our own inability to meet our housing needs." That is the impact of this stranglehold on our communities.

There is also an impact on employment opportunities and unemployment levels. My local authority area stretches from my constituency of Caerphilly northwards to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands). In that small mining valley there are now only four pits left between us and not much else, yet 10,000 people are unemployed.

Conservative Members talk about the need for investment and the generation of employment opportunities by new investment, entrepreneurs and the application of capitalism, but I wonder whether they understand what life is really like in valleys such as that. Do they really understand how destitute those communities are? Do they really understand that there is no prospect of investment coming in from outside under market forces and that only by the organisation of human endeavour, either by central Government or local government, will anything new come to our valleys?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Are not many local authorities sitting like a dog in the manger on building land within their areas and denying it to private developers who would contribute to housing and employment, simply because those authorities want the right to build the houses themselves?

Mr. Davies: I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman fails to understand that I am not talking about dogma or about the application of an abstract philosophy but about the real problems of a real community. I assure the hon. Gentleman and all other hon. Members that anyone who wishes to embark on a construction programme in my valley will find land aplenty. The local authority's housing investment programme has identified the need for 500 new dwellings every year. We cannot attract private capital to the valley to build. That is the nature of our problem. I am not prepared to accept the dogmatic view of local authorities stifling enterprise or development for political reasons. That is utter nonsense. If the hon. Gentleman visited some areas of the country which faced real problems, he would begin to understand the human side of the tragedy which the Government are inflicting.

In Rhymney Valley there is average male unemployment of 22 per cent. In the Pontlottyn employment exchange area, the figure is 42 per cent. When Conservative Members talk about Government investment, aid, expenditure and rate support grant, do they appreciate the impact on a small valley community of male

[Mr. Davies]

unemployment of between 42 per cent. and 44 per cent.? Do they understand how the wealth of a community is sucked out by unemployment of that sort?

Mr. Wareing: Do they care?

Mr. Davies: Indeed. Do they understand how the strength of a community is weakened? Do they understand how the health of individuals is adversely affected by unemployment of that sort? I suspect that they neither know, understand nor care, but in my local authority area people do understand and care.

The area has an industrial development committee, with a part-time chairman, who incidentally works in the royal ordnance factory in Cardiff and will be lucky to have a job next year, as a result of the Government's privatisation programme. If the Secretary of State for Wales spent one tenth as much time in trying to get new investment and employment in Wales as that part-time chairman, we should have a much healthier economy in Rhymney Valley. However, the Government neither care nor understand.

I contacted my county council to ask for some figures about youth unemployment in Mid-Glamorgan. In October 1984, there were 8,616 16 to 17-year-olds. Of those, 31 per cent. were staying in school, and 11 per cent. were going into further education. Some 40 per cent. were placed on the youth training scheme, 8 per cent. were wholly unemployed, and 5 per cent. were in employment. Some 3 per cent. or 4 per cent. were on special measures, or had left the district for an unknown destination.

One could say that those figures were not too bad because, of the whole age group, only 45 per cent. are available for employment, so only 40 per cent. are out of work. However, if one excludes the 2,700 who remain in school or are on further education, there is an appalling figure of 80 per cent. unemployment. That is the real level of youth unemployment in that small mining valley. Eight out of 10 young people who leave school will not get a job.

I know that some Conservative Members will say that there is the youth training scheme, which provides opportunities, and that if young people go into this scheme they will increase their employability because they will get new skills. However, it is no good providing skills if there are no jobs to use those skills. The figures from my valley show that only 30 per cent. of those who leave YTS will get a job, and that figure goes down to a tragic 20 per cent. in the Rhondda valley.

My local authority wishes to do something about unemployment, and that is why it has an industrial development committee. That is why it goes to the Welsh Office, sends deputations to the Secretary of State for Wales, co-operates with the Land Authority for Wales and makes submissions to the Welsh Development Agency and applications for finance to clear derelict land. It builds new industrial estates and starter units. It co-operates to its utmost with the industry department of the Welsh Office. It publicises the area, by coming to London and having publicity stalls. It does all that it can to attract investment and to make sure that people understand the nature of the problem. What do the Government do? They cut the money available to the local authority.

I do not wish to take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West. Conservative Members have spoken about frivolous expenditure and extravaganzas and money that goes to support groups, and so on. My hon. Friend may argue that that expenditure is essential to the fabric of inner-city life, and I shall not disagree. However, nobody can accuse my authority, or any of the Welsh authorities struggling to exist, of extravagance. Least of all can anyone accuse them of being too highly paid.

The new vogue idea is that we must accept wage cuts. I have dug out from the Welsh Office this month's publication of "Welsh Economic Trends" to see how Wales compares with every other region, in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. There are eight regions for the purpose of economic indexation in England. In terms of GDP, Wales is worse off than any of the eight. It is worse off than Scotland, but marginally better off than Northern Ireland, with all the support that goes into that region. In terms of personal disposable income, we are a poorer region than every English region and than Scotland.

If the Government's suggestion of a cure for unemployment is more unemployment, and if they think that the answer to our problem is wage cuts, I ask them how much poorer we have to become before we start to get richer. How much more unemployment do we have to have before we start to get new employment? How destitute do they want us to become? The message that the Government are giving to regions such as mine and to local authorities, through the Gracious Speech and the legislative programme that they have mapped out for the 12 months ahead, is one of destitution and unemployment.

If any hon. Member is tempted to say that that is the price that we have to pay for being in a deprived region, and that the Government went to the country in 1983 and have a mandate because more people voted for them and there are more Tory Members of Parliament and it is their right to pass whatever legislation they wish, I can give them a little advice. I have here a quotation:

> "True democracy cannot just mean one man, one vote. It must mean also that our citizens see clearly the stake they hold in the stability and prosperity of our country."

That is not Karl Marx, but the introduction to a CBI pamphlet called "A share in the action". If the Government will not accept criticism from their political enemies, they should at least be prepared to accept advice from their political friends. Unless they do so, the Government will store up a wealth of bitterness for the years ahead, and that bitterness will come crashing down on their heads.

6.56 pm

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I shall not presume to comment on what the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) said about Wales, but I shall say something about the portion of the Gracious Speech that concerns my area of Greater London, and in particular my constituency of Surbiton. I do not imagine that, like my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground), I shall receive applause from the Opposition Benches when I say that I very much welcome the part of the Gracious Speech that pledges the Government to the abolition of the Greater London council in this Session. We fought the election on that pledge and we received overwhelming support in London, where 56 of the 84 constituencies returned Conservative Members — a larger number than the Conservative party has ever won before.

It is not before time that we are abolishing the GLC. I have a slight disagreement with the Government. I wish that we had brought this legislation forward in the last

Session. We might then have avoided all the complications and confusion of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act, and we might have cleaned up the whole matter by 1985 and spared the people and industry of London a further year of the GLC being able to tinker around with the affairs of London.

We have heard something in his debate about percentages. One percentage that is being quoted is stuck up on a hoarding on the other side of the river. It claims that 74 per cent. of Londoners disagree with the Government and wish to retain the GLC. I wish that the hoarding included another percentage, and I wish that Labour Members would occasionally turn their minds to another percentage. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister talked yesterday about an 11 per cent. figure, but I have been told today that on a narrow interpretation, if one takes out such things as police spending, which is broadly considered local government spending, the GLC handles less than 10 per cent., in rough terms, of the local government spending in this great conurbation. If that is the case, it is clear, and should be spelt out clearly to the people of London, that the primary local government authority in the Greater London conurbation is the borough council. That was what was intended in the legislation in the early 1960s. It was the way that the urban commission intended it. Certainly there is no reason to believe that anything other than the borough councils are needed for the correct government of London.

Mr. David Penhaligon (Truro): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is also true that the Department of Health and Social Security spends vastly more than the Foreign Office but that that is not necessarily a reason for abolishing the Foreign Office?

Mr. Tracey: The hon. Gentleman is making a rather abstruse point. He makes a bit of a habit of that, coming from a distant corner of our land. However, it is not relevant to local government in the Greater London conurbation. The fact is—it should be repeated time and again even if the GLC propagandists will not put it up on the front of their building—that the GLC manages less than 10 per cent. of local government spending in the conurbation.

Since the general election last year people have been confused by the spending of £12 million of ratepayers' money on propaganda. I am not talking simply about the hoarding across the river. On practically every corner in London a hoarding has been put up by Mr. Livingstone and his propagandists in the GLC. The newspapers—*The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*—have double-page spreads of propaganda paid for by ratepayers' money. A lot of brainwashing can be done with £12 million. It can have a great deal of influence on the sort of answers that a few people in London will give to opinion polls.

Mr. Tony Banks: In fairness to the House, the hon. Gentleman should not pluck figures from the air. There is no basis in fact for a figure of £12 million. I shall gladly admit to the figure of £6 million in the present financial year. How much are the Government spending on advertising their services through different Departments, much of which we would consider to be party political propaganda? That figure is about £100 million. How much is the Department of the Environment spending on the leaflet that it is distributing through all the rate-capped areas?

Mr. Tracey: I would accept some criticism from the hon. Gentleman if he could convince me that any one of the GLC advertisements that I am talking about mentioned services. Apart from telling us that the GLC is apparently working for London, nothing else is said about services. The expenditure of £12 million is perfectly well documented. It includes not only direct expenditure on advertising hoardings, advertising in newspapers, and so on, but numerous leaflets coming not simply from the GLC but from many other bodies that the GLC has been conveniently propping up as indirect propaganda sources in its scurrilous campaign of misinformation in the capital city.

Only two or three years ago the people of London hardly knew what the GLC did for them. Indeed, those hon. Members who, like myself, have canvassed in GLC elections over the years will know perfectly well that one could stand on a doorstep and talk about voting in the GLC election and people would ask whether there was really any need to vote, what the GLC did, what it was about and whether the local councils and Parliament were not far more important. I am sure that that is perfectly well accepted by Labour Members, if they are honest with themselves and if they think back. Until the propaganda campaign started, the GLC was virtually unknown to the people of London as a real force.

Those who attempted to approach the GLC to ask for any task to be carried out would meet exactly the kind of image that the GLC is now claiming for Whitehall. On another of those massive hoardings that we see on the street corners there is depicted a brick wall wearing a pin-stripe suit and a bowler hat. That is the true interpretation of the attitudes of so many people in the GLC—both now and a few years ago.

The idea of the abolition of the GLC in the Conservative party has been building up for several years. I recollect only too well that in 1977, after Sir Horace Cutler had won a memorable election victory, there was talk in the Conservative party to the effect that if we were to carry out our intended policy of devolving the housing responsibilities of the GLC to the boroughs there would not be much left to do.

Well, the Conservative party devolved the housing responsibilities to the boroughs in about 1979. The GLC's responsibilities for local government work in London fell from between 25 and 30 per cent. to between 20 and 15 per cent. We know now that since my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport piloted through the excellent London Regional Transport Act those responsibilities have fallen even further. Indeed, as I said earlier, they have fallen to the point that the GLC is now responsible for 10 per cent., probably less, of the work of Greater London.

Mr. Tony Banks: Would the hon. Gentleman care to go back to that election victory of 1977 when the Conservatives won and the then leader of the Opposition, now the Prime Minister, described the GLC Tory victory as being the jewel in the crown? What has changed her mind about the jewel, or indeed the crown?

Mr. Tracey: The hon. Gentleman may or may not accept that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister felt that Londoners were beginning to accept the essential Conservative philosophy of cleaning up local government expenditure and devolving powers where they truly

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belonged, according to Sir Horace Cutler's policy which was endorsed. The jewel in the crown was the fact that it was a major breakthrough that the electorate should understand that Conservative policy.

While we are talking about past policies let me remind the hon. Gentleman—does he need reminding?—that in 1979 the friend to whom he talks so regularly, Mr. Ken Livingstone, said in a debate in county hall:

"I feel a degree of regret that Marshall"—

Lord Marshall, who had just conducted an inquiry—

"did not push on and say 'abolish the GLC', because I think it would have been a major saving and would have released massive resources which could have been put into far more productive use."

Perhaps Mr. Ken Livingstone would like to put that quotation on the front of county hall so that Londoners can see what he said in 1979.

Even better, perhaps Mr. Livingstone would like to put up another quote which was given more recently, in June 1982. He spoke to a conference of council treasurers—the conference of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy—and said:

"I have always at heart been committed to the borough council rather than to regional government."

How can a man change his mind so much and commit himself to so much hypocritical advertising when he has said twice in the past few years that he believes in precisely what this Government now propose?

At the risk of embarrassing Opposition Members and of reminding them of their true hypocrisy, I must give two more quotations. They are essential, and should be grasped by the people when considering this timely Bill. Here is an interesting quotation:

"The Labour party is now preparing a major programme of local government reform. The time has come once and for all to introduce what most people devoted to local government now recognise as the most democratic as well as the most efficient form of authority. We shall therefore legislate to create unitary district authorities which will be responsible for all of the functions in their area that they can sensibly undertake".

That quotation comes from a press release issued on 11 February 1983—I believe at the time of the local government conference of the Labour party in Portsmouth—by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who was then shadow Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. Tony Banks: And look what happened to him.

Mr. Tracey: The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) seems to be muttering from a sedentary position. It may be suggested that that was the individual view of the right hon. Member for Gorton, but what about this quotation:

"We aim to end if we can the confusing division of services between two tiers of authority. Unitary district authorities in England and Wales could be responsible for all the functions in this area that they could sensibly undertake"?

That quotation comes from the Labour party's manifesto for the general election in June 1983. Presumably it was subscribed to by the massed ranks on the Opposition Benches. How can Labour Members seriously tell us this afternoon that they believe in the two tiers, the GLC and the London borough councils, which are, of course, the primary authorities? The fact is that Labour Members genuinely believe in the same policies as us. It is simply for reasons of hypocrisy and political cant that they say that this afternoon——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot accuse other hon. Members of hypocrisy. I ask him to withdraw that word. I am sure that he can find another word with which to express the meaning that he wishes to convey.

Mr. Tracey: I withdraw that word, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Perhaps Labour Members believe in factual inexactitude and a certain amount of dyslexia. I hope that you will accept the word cynical, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I believe that some extremely cynical political campaigning has come from Opposition Members and their colleagues across the river. They suggest that Londoners will be worse off under this Government's policies which will shortly be set out in a Bill.

We believe that local government does mean local. That is what we are aiming at. We believe that people will get better value for money and more attention and sensitivity if they deal with their local borough councils. I suspect that that view is shared by the staff across the river. It was interesting to hear, during this so-called day of action when there has been talk of democracy and so on from some Opposition Members, that the members of the GLC's staff association were advised by their leaders not to have any part in the charade that is being played by their political masters in county hall.

The people of London will be better served by their borough councillors than by those in county hall. In my borough, the people will be served by 50 councillors as against two members of the GLC. I believe that they will be served better by their town hall than by county hall, which is superfluous to the local government of London.

7.15 pm

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I am glad to speak after the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) and to correct some of his misconceptions. He said that in London only 10 per cent. of expenditure was spent by the GLC and that that was a good reason for abolishing it. The Secretary of State referred to the same figures when he opened the debate. There is an inconsistency in the Government's argument. In one breath they say that the GLC is extravagant and wastes money and in the next they say that it cannot be serving any useful purpose because its expenditure is less than 10 per cent. of expenditure in London.

However, there is no inconsistency in the Labour party's attitude or in the quotations that have been given from different spokesmen who say that they believe that most of the powers should rest with the borough authorities. At present that is exactly the position in London and the metropolitan counties. Indeed, there would be support for a Bill introduced during this Session if it reorganised local government throughout the country and if that reorganisation was based on unitary authorities and involved passing power back to the boroughs in the non-metropolitan counties.

I represent a non-metropolitan borough that was a county borough and we have always fought, and will continue to fight, for some of the services to be returned to a more local level, where they can be administered more closely to the people, thus providing a better service. I certainly believe that the social services should be tied to the authorities with housing departments. It is nonsense that boroughs such as Burnley, Blackburn, Preston, Nottingham, Portsmouth, Bristol and so on do not have

any responsibility for the social services. The Labour party stands for returning more powers to the local boroughs where applicable.

The hon. Member for Surbiton gave a quotation containing the words

"that they could sensibly undertake."

That brings us back to the old argument. We would argue that some services and powers need to rest with a tier of local government that is above the borough level and that there is thus a need for a second tier of government. However, the services must be at the right level. In the metropolitan counties, the division of services is probably reasonable and fair, but in the shire counties there is a need to bring them back closer to the people.

I was a councillor in London in the early 1960s at the time of the Herbert commission report, which led to the 1963 reorganisation of London. I accept that the Labour party was then mainly opposed to that legislation. However, I happened to be in favour of it, as I believed that it was the right way forward. After all, the boundaries that then existed for London county council had been drawn in 1889. They may have been fair and sensible then, but they did not take account of the urban development and sprawl that took place at the end of the last century and the beginning of this.

Therefore, that reorganisation merely recognised London's boundaries as they were in 1963. I was on Merton and Morden district council in the old Surrey county council area. I did not believe that we were part of Surrey in that context. Our affinity was with London. Transport and other responsibilities had to be tied in with London. We need the GLC and metropolitan counties because planning and co-operation cannot be dealt with by the individual boroughs.

I was in Manchester when the metropolitan counties were established in the 1970s. Before reorganisation, as many as six different bus services could operate, charging six different fares on some routes. That was nonsense. It is right that greater Manchester should run transport for the whole area.

Although I had no traditional roots in the area, I always recognised that Manchester was not just the city but greater Manchester. Bolton, Rochdale, Oldham and other places belong to greater Manchester and have to be tied for certain aspects of local government.

We still await the exact proposals, but I believe that the joint boards and quangos will be undemocratic. They will not operate in the interests of good local government. The Bill will not improve services for the people. Its motive is purely political. The Bill is certainly not in the interests of local government. We need some reorganisation, but the shire counties should have priority.

Local government should be able to spend more money. Central Government restrictions are tying the hands of local government behind its back. Local authorities are tied on capital and revenue expenditure, yet in 1979 the Government were elected on the commitment to give freedom to local government. They have provided that freedom, but they have stopped local government from doing anything because they have withdrawn its financial power. Local government needs more money so that it can provide the services and meet the needs of the community. The people at local level know which services are required. I do not believe that local government has been irresponsible in that respect.

I accept that central Government, whether Labour or Conservative, has the right to say how much funding will come from central Government. Local government has the right to argue that that amount is insufficient. The Opposition have the same right. I accept that the Government have the right to say, "This is what we are prepared to spend," but they do not then have the right to tell local government that it cannot raise funds locally if the local people are prepared to let them do it. That is how the Government are going wrong. They should allow local councils the freedom to raise funds to provide the required services.

The Secretary of State referred to the privatisation of refuse collection. The proposition is nonsense. In my many years in local government I have seen the results of the pressures on direct labour organisations. I remember a company in Burnley which beat direct labour on a contract for sheltered housing. Soon after the contract was completed, the company went out of business. Some companies are prepared to cut corners and prices, but once they have put direct labour out of business they will be free to charge what they want, because there will be no competition. A direct labour organisation cannot be recreated overnight. That is what the Tory legislation is about. The Government say, "Let's get rid of direct labour and cleansing departments." Once they succeed, local government will have to pay a high price.

More money should be spent on the provision of homes for the elderly. Councils are unable to provide homes for the elderly because they do not have the resources. They are tied by revenue restrictions. At the same time, there is a massive growth throughout the country of private residential homes for the elderly. The people who need the homes cannot afford them and are subsidised by about £45 a week each by the DHSS. I am not against that money being paid to look after our elderly people, but I am against people making profit out of the elderly. It is a disgrace. Local government has a responsibility to care for the elderly and it should be given sufficient money to provide homes for all the elderly people who require them.

Local government must also provide more sheltered housing. Sufficient resources are not available to meet the demand. About £15 million-worth of applications for grant have been made in Burnley, but only £3 million is available. It will be at least 15 years before Burnley is able to modernise its pre-war council houses and bring them up to an acceptable standard. That is deplorable and unacceptable. We need more resources. Despite that, the Government talk of cutting £500 million or £600 million off the money that might be available for next year's housing programme. We need more resources, not fewer.

The White Paper on transport, published in July, is appalling and will be a disaster for bus services. In the last five days, I have received about 300 communications from constituents protesting at the proposed Bill. They are worried about the future of bus services in their area. Many Conservatives will have to worry about what will happen to their local bus services.

There will be competition. People will want to run buses in the rush hours along the busiest routes, but they will not want to run them out of the rush hours when pensioners want to go to do their shopping or in the evening when people want to go into town. The people will not then have the transport to which they are entitled.

I served on Burnley's joint transport committee. Burnley has run its transport with a neighbouring borough

[Mr. Peter Pike]

for 50 years. Of all the committees on which I served that was the most difficult. It is difficult to balance the charge to the passenger, the Government and the rate subsidy with breaking even and providing a service.

Burnley and Pendle made the first agency agreement with the National Bus Company and other operators. We signed it a number of years ago and it became a model. From that date all the services were co-ordinated. If we have spare buses they run on the Ribble route; if Ribble has spare buses they operate on our routes. We use the buses sensibly and logically to reduce the overall commitment. Manchester and west Yorkshire buses, and others, run on our routes. We try to reduce the cost to ratepayers.

In Lancashire, 10 operators carry 110 million passengers a year on nearly 1,000 buses and the turnover is more than £54 million. The Lancashire bus network is the biggest for any shire county. About 60 per cent. of the county's bus routes require subsidy and 40 per cent. of Lancashire households do not have a car. The percentage of non-car owners in my constituency is higher than that. About 50 per cent. of the constituents in Blackburn and Burnley do not have cars. Only one bus route in Burnley makes a profit and it does so for only part of the day. In many outlying rural areas it is not possible to run an economic bus service, but we must provide a service. It is the elderly and the young who will be hit hardest if we eliminate the public service.

The National Bus Company has said, "If you wish to privatise go ahead, because we do not want to get involved in the privatisation argument." However, it has added, "If you do privatise, do not split up the company, because that would be a disaster." That is the view that Lord Shepherd would express and it is the view of the Ribble management in Lancashire.

I believe that there will be a massive public outcry against the Bill if it is drafted along the lines of the White Paper. Privatisation and deregulation will mean the withdrawal of many evening, Saturday and off-peak services. It will mean substantial cuts to essential rural and suburban routes. There will be massive reductions in the size of the bus network. Co-ordinated bus timetables will be replaced with irregular and sporadic ones. It has been said in some of the trial areas that some buses will not run unless it is commercially viable for them to do so. There will be more older buses and a consequent reduction in the standards of safety, maintenance and cleanliness. In some trial areas, buses have operated with a bucket in which to throw the fare and a cardboard sticker stating the bus's destination. There will be major problems for the young, the elderly and all who are dependent on bus services. The Bill will be a tragedy for bus transport and the Government must think again.

Bus transport should be available when it is needed. It does not matter much whether we are car owners now because at some stage we shall all depend on public transport. Buses should be available when we want to travel on them and not only at peak hours. We want to know that there is a service that will take us to where we want to get. It must be a regular and efficient service and we should ensure that it is made available. The Government's proposals in the White Paper will not lead to such provision. They may lead to some who live on the route of a good service enjoying a benefit, but the majority will lose. It will be a disaster and the Government must think again, discard the proposals in the White Paper and reject the idea of introducing a privatisation Bill.

7.33 pm

Mr. Rob Hayward (Kingswood): I am grateful to be able to participate in the debate after the remarks of the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) about the possibility of transferring certain services from county councils and his assertion that the services provided by the metropolitan counties are about right.

I presumed that this debate would provide an opportunity for Opposition Members to express their seething anger and opposition to the abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan counties. Does the present attendance of Opposition Members reflect the Opposition's display of seething anger against the abolition of the authorities? For the past 10 or 15 minutes there have been more Opposition Members present representing Welsh constituencies than those representing metropolitan counties. There have been more Opposition Members present representing Lancashire than those representing constituencies in the GLC. This is the Opposition's seething anger against abolition!

The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) has pointed several times to the Government Benches, but this debate is the Opposition's opportunity to express opposition to the proposed abolition. It is not necessary on this occasion for large numbers of Members to express their support for the proposal. It is traditional for those who oppose a proposal to take their place in the Chamber and to oppose it.

We are witnessing the attendance of those who oppose the Government's proposed abolition Bill. They consist of Members representing Welsh and Lancashire seats: there are few from the metropolitan counties. Throughout the debate, only one Opposition Member has been present who represents a constituency within the area of the West Midlands county council, and he was on the Opposition Front Bench. This is the seething resentment of the Opposition that we are facing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) and I opposed the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Bill, as it then was, but I do not share the views that he expressed on the proposed abolition Bill. I also understand that my hon. Friend's views are not shared by one or two of my hon. Friends who voted against the interim provisions Bill in the previous Session.

I shall now direct my remarks specifically to airports. Many decisions will be taken within the next few months affecting airports throughout the country. These decisions will have an effect for the next decade and could well have a bearing on air services into the year 2000 and beyond.

The fourth terminal at Heathrow is to be opened next year and there is a commitment that when it is opened the air traffic movements should be limited to 275,000 per annum. That commitment was entered into but it was said that the limit would be reviewed when new aircraft, capable of operating at much lower noise levels, were introduced. The new noise limits will be come effective on 1 January 1986. The new limit of 275,000 ATMs will be imposed in October 1985 and there will be an opportunity for review on 1 January 1986. Surely it would be logical for the review to begin now so that any decision on the level of ATMs can be taken in advance of the opening of the fourth terminal at Heathrow.

When it was decided in 1979 that the limit of 275,000 ATMs should apply, the nature of the aircraft then flying was very different from the nature of those currently flying and which will be flying out of Heathrow in 1986. The noise nuisance which was presumed in 1979 was very different from that which applies now and it will be substantially different from that which will apply from 1 January 1986. I ask the Government seriously to consider removing the limit and accepting the part of the Civil Aviation Authority's report which advocates a possible limit of 315,000 ATMs per annum. Paragraph 35 of the CAA's report states:

"Indubitably so far as the needs of all categories of users and the efficient development of airlines are concerned, the national interest is best served by developing to the full the potential of those airports to which the market-place has awarded the accolade of success and growth. In the national commercial interest, the right policy must surely be to maximise the opportunities for British airlines to exploit the positive attributes of the best airports that we have. We should look therefore to every possibility for increasing their opportunities to serve Heathrow and Gatwick. The first priority must be to build on proven success."

I share that view, as do most of the British airways and international airways. It seems sensible to follow the policy that is advocated by the CAA. Paragraph 37 of its report states:

"These restrictions were adopted on the basis of expectations about the levels of aircraft noise and other developments which have largely been falsified by subsequent events."

We must grapple with the problem of growing air traffic movement. If we do not, we shall have to decide whether there should be a fifth terminal at Heathrow or whether we should go ahead and develop Stansted. The Government will probably have to take up that issue during the Session also.

If the limit of 275,000 air traffic movements is retained, the excess will have to go somewhere. If it goes to other countries in Europe, we shall, as a country, lose the revenue from the movements of those aircraft. In addition, there will be the loss sustained as a result of some tourists not coming to Britain. The other possibility is that the flights will be forced to go to somewhere else, such as Stansted.

If there is an environmental difficulty in flying in and out of Heathrow, or if it causes a problem to have one movement or 15,000 movements in and out of Heathrow over and above the 275,000, surely there is an environmental problem wherever those flights go.

I share the views of large numbers of hon. Members in all parts of the House that it is not in the nation's interest that a third major airport should be developed in the south-east of England. When we advocate that Stansted should be expanded, we seem to assume that no one lives around Stansted, but large numbers of people live in that area, and the population is growing very rapidly on both sides of the county border of Essex and Hertfordshire. The population around Heathrow airport, by contrast, is relatively static. By having a third major airport at Stansted we shall only move the problem from one place to another, to the detriment not only of Heathrow and Gatwick but of the provincial airports.

Mr. Ground: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene on what, I fear, may be another matter on which I shall disagree with him. Will he agree that for every 10,000 people affected at Stansted there are hundreds of thousands of people affected in west London?

Mr. Hayward: No. I referred to the noise footprints at the different NNI levels, using them as an assessment of the disturbance caused to local residents, but because of the change in technology in aero engines and aero wings, we are no longer talking about hundreds of thousands or millions of people in the way that we did previously. The footprints have progressively narrowed and will continue to do so. I accept that there will always be substantially more people affected at Heathrow, but the people in that area are already inconvenienced by 275,000 movements per annum. To take up huge areas of land in Essex for the expansion of a third south-eastern airport cannot be in the best interests of the area's of the nation's economy.

In arguing that the figure should be raised to about 315,000 air traffic movements, I am not advocating that the night flight restrictions should be removed. The figure of 315,000 can well be accommodated with ordinary daytime operations. Circumstances have changed. When the original application was made for 260,000 ATMs as a limit, that was the assumed capacity of Heathrow's runways. That is no longer so. It is now probably about 330,000 on daytime movements alone.

The solution to part of the problem—and it is a very limited solution—lies in the stolport, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) referred earlier. The problem of the stolport has been with us for longer than I realised. In preparing my comments I looked at the *Financial Times* of 12 October 1983, which said that

"The inquiry into the scheme is still in progress and a decision by the Secretary of State for the Environment is not likely before early next year."

That report referred to early 1984, and it now looks as though the decision will not be taken before early 1985. The longer any decision on airports is delayed—and particularly on a project such as the stolport—the more likely it is that there will be increasing pressure for the development of Stansted.

Provincial airports have a major service to offer in the overall provision of air movements, not only within Britain but within Europe as a whole. I have in mind airports such as East Midlands, Birmingham, Manchester, those in Scotland and Bristol airport. I have already referred to Heathrow airport, which is close to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston, and I hestitate to mention Bristol airport, as it is within your own constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But those provincial airports can ease the burden on the south-eastern airports by providing routes into Europe at a greater level than at present. There is an indication from most provincial airports that the demand is growing. There are applications from a large number of provincial airports for extra funding. If, with the support of the Government, that extra funding is granted, the improved facilities will be able to provide services into Europe and will ease the problem for the south-east.

I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that my comments fall within the words of the Gracious speech to which the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) referred:

"Other matters will be laid before you".

It is with those comments that I should like to conclude.

7.46 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): When I heard the Gracious Speech from the Throne

[Mr. Robert N. Wareing]

yesterday I was waiting for some proposals which would have been of assistance to my constituents and to the rest of the people of Liverpool. I heard nothing whatever which would help them or which was relevant in any way to their problems.

I listened this afternoon to the Secretary of State for the Environment in the hope that we might hear something from the Government about how they intend to help local authorities to keep within the law by meeting the needs of people who require social services, adequate housing, and proper fire precautions in their flats. I heard nothing whatever about such matters.

When the Government talk about law breakers, they should ask themselves which laws they do not want local authorities to break. Throughout his speech the Secretary of State spoke of the need for controls over local authorities' public expenditure. None of that was relevant. Incidentally, when the Government talk of law breakers, do they include the people who broke the law some years ago by exporting goods illegally to the rebel regime in Southern Rhodesia? When the next Labour Government come to power we shall need to dust the Bingham report and take it down from the shelves, so that we can see who were the real law breakers then.

I looked for a glimmer of hope for the 29,000 people in Liverpool with unmet housing needs. There was no mention of housing. The Minister for Housing and Construction, who has at least seen some of the conditions in part of my constituency, has been silent. He sat on the Government Front Bench like an ornament. I do not know whether he intends to intervene in the debate at some point, but we have a right to hear what he intends to do as a result of his recent visit to Liverpool.

In Liverpool we have a long queue of people who are supposed to have medical priority for rehousing. There are cancer patients and people suffering from emphysema who visit me in my surgery. They do not ask me when the Government intend to privatise this, that or the other concern. Such things are totally irrelevant to their problems. In Liverpool, 5,000 corporation houses are lying empty after 10 years of neglect by the Liberals—that other Tory party on the Liverpool city council—aided and abetted by the rump of the Tory party. The Tory party has only nine members on the Liverpool city council, so that there is no prospect whatever of the Tory party ever again coming to power in Liverpool. Labour city councillors in Liverpool had to face the problem of housing neglect when they came to office in 1983. That is why they are dealing with it by looking at 17 priority areas for which they need Government assistance.

There is nothing in the Queen's Speech to help those in my constituency and other parts of the city of Liverpool who, every morning, have to clear up the open areas outside their flats because drug addicts have been there the night before. Drug addicts did not exist in large numbers in the city until it was ravaged by the Government's economic policies—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I assure Conservative Members that that is so. The people on Croxteth housing estate never knew what heroin was until we had massive unemployment, with 94 per cent. of young people on that estate without permanent employment. That is the serious issue to which the Government should address themselves.

Old people and one-parent families are isolated on huge housing estates. Their only hope lies in the Merseyside county council giving assistance through cheaper fares policies on the buses. Those fares allow relatives—often unemployed—to visit the old folk. There was no mention of such policies in the Gracious Speech. There was only one glimmer of hope, in the sentence that read:

"Other measures will be laid before you."

We live in hope, for that is all that we have under the Government. We hope that there will be some measures laid before us that will help the chronically sick and disabled to get their rights under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. We hope that there will be measures to allow old folk to be properly cared for instead of put up in hotels, as thousands are—at a huge cost to the ratepayers, about whom the Conservative party is supposed to be so concerned. Some 2,200 families in London alone are housed in hotels at an average cost of £200 a week. That is more than right hon. and hon. Members receive as an allowance for living in London to do our duties in the House.

We read that the Government are deeply concerned about unemployment, yet at the same time as we have such serious problems, we find that the Secretary of State is trying—he has not been successful so far—to argue his corner in the Cabinet in a bid to save £600 million that his right hon. Friend—he is not a friend to many people—the Chancellor of the Exchequer wants to lop off expenditure on housing, construction and improvement grants.

When the Conservative party talks about feathering the nests of its friends in private industry, it should consider how much private industry depends upon tenders from local authorities. Conservative Members should consider how many people in the building industry—perhaps in a small way—are dependent upon contracts from local authorities. The Government now refuse to give adequate housing investment aid to our people, so some private companies face bankruptcy and are having to shed their labour force.

In our country, we have the obscenity of 400,000 building workers on the dole at the same time as 1·2 million people are on housing waiting lists. Some 300,000 people are classified as homeless and 1·2 million houses are officially classified as unfit for human habitation.

Since 1979, 700,000 council houses have been sold but only 275,000 have been built. The other Tories in Liverpool—the Liberal party—did not build a single council house for four or five years before the Labour party came to office. One cannot tell people to buy their own house. Where does an unemployed person get a mortgage to buy a house, even his own council house? It is impossible. I say to hon. Members who look for a property-owning democracy that for people who live in large areas of Liverpool the property-owning democracy is a long way away. Although the Secretary of State has seen some of the housing problems in Liverpool, and has said that they are the worst that he has seen anywhere, all that we get from him are threats about what will happen next year to Liverpool city council if it does not carry out his diktat.

We often compare this Tory Government with the more compassionate—in inverted commas, perhaps—period of Harold Macmillan, Eden or Churchill after the war. However, we could even compare this extremist Tory Government with the Government of the 1930s. I recall

that some years ago Lord Boothby said that that Government were a disaster, but even they managed to reflate the economy. In 1932, 22 per cent. of working people were unemployed, but by 1937 a figure of only 9·7 per cent. unemployment reigned. Part of the reason for the reduction was the huge housing investment in the building of council and municipal estates in probably every city in the United Kingdom. We can see the result today. However, the present Government turn their face from the problem.

We are used to the fact that the Government are blind to the needs of people in the large conurbations. The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) accused Labour Members of not being here in large numbers to argue the case for the metropolitan counties. I notice that he is no longer here, but I assure him that the Bill that the Secretary of State threatens to bring before the House in the next few weeks will be bitterly opposed. We in the Opposition know that it will be bitterly opposed, with the support of the overwhelming majority of people in our areas. I know that I can speak with authority for the people of Merseyside, who are overwhelmingly in support of their county council.

A parish magazine was sent to me only this morning from St. Andrew's church in my constituency. One of the articles states that the church hall is being rebuilt, thanks to help from Merseyside Improvements Ltd, which is working for us because it is part of Merseyside county council's enterprise for creating jobs. We have created 8,000 jobs through our assistance schemes on Merseyside for small businesses and co-operatives. I can tell the people of Merseyside that, if the Government get their way, many services will disappear for ever. We can say goodbye to ferries on the river Mersey. We can say goodbye to Liverpool airport. The speech of the hon. Member for Kingswood was mainly concerned with airports and the need for airports in provincial towns.

There will be an end to cheaper bus fares. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), I represent a constituency where a considerable number of people have no car. In one area, according to the 1981 census, 75 per cent. are not car owners. Like the old people, they depend upon cheaper fares. There will be an end to all Merseyside council's schemes to help the unemployed by providing special centres and encouraging small businesses and co-operatives.

No assistance will be forthcoming — or none is suggested in the Queen's Speech—for drug addicts. I know that this is not the province of the Secretary of State, but local authorities such as Liverpool and Merseyside have been giving positive assistance to voluntary efforts to treat those who need help because of their addiction to heroin. There was no mention of any help in that area, despite all the wonderful words at the Tory party conference only a few weeks ago.

The Secretary of State tells us that there will still be democratically elected local authorities. He points to the districts and the London boroughs. The fact is, however, that on Merseyside only 4 per cent. of the functions of the Merseyside county council will go to each of the five directly elected local authorities. Eighty per cent. of the expenditure of Merseyside county council is on the police, the fire service, the highways and passenger transport, and all those services will be administered by joint boards. The feeling of integration which a large county council such as Merseyside has will be lacking.

All the problems which existed before 1974 will reappear — the problems of overspill, overlap and duplication. We will see a return to the situation before the local government reform of the 1880s and 1890s, when there was a chaos of authorities. If the Bill becomes law, there will a chaos of authorities, each with the right to levy a rate. The ratepayers may receive not just one rate demand but a score of them.

Let us not be under the impression that the Government are doing what they are doing because they are incompetent. They are not incompetent. They may be evil. They may be wicked. They are certainly immoral. I accuse the Government of deliberately creating the class society which the Prime Minister idealises. The Prime Minister wants a return to Victorian values, and the Government are doing their job.

There is a lesson here for the Labour party. We must appreciate that we live in a class society—a society which is becoming even more divided as a result of the Government's policies. None of their policies is more divisive than the attack upon the organisations which exist to protect the working people—the mass of the people —from the tremors of the economic system. There has been an attack on the trade unions which protect the workers at their place of work. There is an attack on local authorities. People who elect Labour councils want them to protect them in their community. We are facing the most class-generating Government that there has been since the end of the second world war or earlier.

We must recognise the Government for what they are. I expect from the Government no redress for the ills of our society. I hope, however, that those Conservative Members who have some guts and some spirit and who still believe in a more compassionate society will rid themselves of the scourge of the present Prime Minister and a Front Bench of men who are nothing but her puppets and who are incapable of leading the country into a more just and generous society.

8.5 pm

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): As a London Member, I am pleased to have the opportunity warmly to welcome the proposals in the Queen's Speech for the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils.

I had a unique opportunity this summer to find out exactly what my electors thought about the GLC. The GLC wished on London a series of four mock by-elections, and one of them fell in the old Edmonton constituency, which coincides with much of the area that I represent. I went out of my way to talk to as many of my constituents as possible. It was a golden opportunity to canvass their views, although we did not put up candidates ourselves in the spurious by-elections. We found that well over 70 per cent. of the electors in Edmonton thought that the Government's proposals would bring local government closer to them and that they would feel more able to influence decision making in local government. That is the key argument in favour of the Government's proposal, because the Government are concerned with democracy and accountability.

On the day of the by-election, the electors reacted in some ways as hon. Members have reacted today—they stayed away from the event. There was a turnout of only 20 per cent. I am pleased to say that my Conservative association had worked hard to persuade people of what they should do. It was no coincidence that there was a low

[Dr. Ian Twinn]

turnout. We had done a full canvass. No Opposition Member could claim that people were misled or uninterested. We found that people on the doorstep were passionately interested. They saw through the gimmick of the Labour party in London in calling the by-elections, and they stayed away in droves.

There is a conflict—I am the first to admit it—between the voting behaviour of electors on election day and the results of polls in London, advertised by the GLC, which show that many Londoners are worried about the abolition of the GLC and seem to show some support—spurious support, in my view—for the Labour group on the GLC. However, it is not surprising that London electors feel confused and worried. If I had had over £12 million over the past two or three years to spend on putting my views to the electors of London, I am sure that I could have persuaded them of the virtues of those views.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) has talked about morality. What can one say about the morality of the Labour members of the GLC who have spent £12 million of ratepayers' money on party political propaganda designed to bribe the electors of London and persuade them to support their views? The expenditure of such a sum of money is bound to have some effect. If advertisements had no effect, we should hardly have an advertising industry as strong as we do. The money spent by the GLC on advertising may have been better spent on some of the voluntary organisations that the GLC shouts about so much. The £12 million would have gone a long way. There are causes in my constituency that would have benefited greatly from cash handouts from the GLC.

Mr. Tony Banks: They have had them.

Dr. Twinn: They have had very little.

During the last Session of Parliament the director general of the GLC produced for us a list of the great works that the GLC had managed over the years. I went through it. I admit that it was not a full list but the best examples of the grants and help that had been given to Londoners. There were only 2,000 or 3,000 given to my constituents despite the fact that we have areas of need. Over the boundary in Haringey we find that money has been pouring out to women's groups and all sorts of other fringe groups. They may be worthy. I am not necessarily criticising the aims of those groups.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that women constitute a fringe group?

Dr. Twinn: I am suggesting that the activities of some of the groups that call themselves women's groups are fringe activities. Some of them are fringe groups. I hasten to add that women should not be described as "fringe", as so ably demonstrated by the hon. Lady. Perhaps I may congratulate her on her new appointment to speak on transport matters for the Opposition.

The GLC has done precious little for Edmonton over the years. The results of that neglect have been shown by the attitude of voters in Edmonton.

I regularly see refugees pouring over the boundary from Haringey. There are firms which, with the combination of the high rates in the London borough of Haringey and the crippling rates piled on by the GLC, can no longer conduct their businesses there and move into the relative haven of Enfield where we have only the GLC's crippling rate. Unfortunately, too many of those firms jump the London boroughs. They miss Enfield and fly to the counties where there are more sympathetic councils that are far more interested in retaining jobs for their residents. That is something that the GLC has neglected.

The Edmonton electors have carefully considered the GLC's record on transport. There are its proposals for night and weekend lorry bans in London. I represent a strong manufacturing area. We rely upon the regular movement of goods from factories working through the night. We are to be told that they can move their goods in and out of their factories only at the whim of the GLC. That will force out manufacturing jobs from my constituency, jobs from London generally and jobs beyond the M25 ring. That is a disgrace.

We hear pious platitudes from county hall about saving jobs, although there are proposals for weekend and night lorry bans which will destroy jobs in our areas. The GLC has done more than that. It has held up useful lorry bans which could have been implemented—for example, the Barnet-Enfield lorry ban. It is a small area lorry ban. We could have had many more lorry bans in London to protect residential areas. *[Interruption.]* Opposition transport spokespersons choose to laugh about that. They find it humorous that they can create discomfort for residential areas so that they can implement their infamous schemes for banning commercial traffic from the whole of London.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Can the hon. Gentleman give the House any good reason why the citizens of other parts of Greater London should not enjoy the same benefits of lorry bans as those whom he represents in Enfield?

Dr. Twinn: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. There is no reason why other areas of Greater London should not benefit from lorry bans, but they should not be blanket lorry bans. They should be lorry bans to protect distinct small residential areas from noise and fume pollution. It is no answer to implement a complete blanket lorry ban.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Dr. Twinn: I continue because I know that the hon. Gentleman will take every opportunity to divert me on to other roads and it is other roads that I wish to deal with—for example, the north circular road. I welcome the Government's programme for road improvement and the benefit that it will bring to my constituents. Despite the literary associations of the constituency, being well known for John Gilpin and an earlier form of transport, we are also far too well known as a vast bottleneck and traffic jam at the Angel in Edmonton where traffic piles up east, west, north and south, as any listener to Capital Radio knows. We receive free publicity for the constituency in a rather unfortunate way.

The Department of Transport has just announced preferred routes for road improvements on the north circular. They will be greatly welcomed in the constituency. Unfortunately, they are opposed by the GLC, which again shows its cavalier disregard for the need to protect local residents and to encourage local industry; to allow it to remain, expand and invest in a secure future knowing that it can move its goods in and out.

I welcome the Government's approach to the reform of local government—to make local government in London

more democratic and to give my electors a chance to have a greater say in how local government is organised. Although I welcome it, I urge the Government to bring all powers down to the lowest possible level — the boroughs. I hope that when the Government introduce the legislation they will avoid giving power to those sombre towers that dominate London — the Departments of Transport and the Environment in Marsham street. If there is a worry that my constituents share with me, it is that civil servants in the Departments of Environment and Transport, however ably they are led by my right hon. and hon. Friends, will not be in touch with what my electors want.

I hope to hear that the Government will not keep powers unnecessarily and how they intend necessary reserve powers to be used. It will be necessary for the Departments of the Environment and Transport to use reserve powers, because however much we love our neighbours, whether they are Socialist or Conservative, one London borough will at times disagree with another. They will come into conflict, and that will have to be resolved. I hope that the Government will be able to help London on that.

I am not impressed by the rumours I hear that the House might be persuaded to have a committee of London Members as a talking shop to oversee London matters. I find that idea repellent, because of what we have witnessed today. On these Benches there are two London Members. During previous Sessions of Parliament few London Members on either side have turned up for London debates. I am not convinced that regular committee meetings will have a better turnout, or that people elected to this place are necessarily those who should be talking about the local government needs of London. If I were to believe that, I should contradict myself. I have spent some minutes in trying to persuade Opposition Members that we want more local democracy. To institute discussions in the House would be contrary to that.

I certainly do not believe that I have a mandate from June 1983 to talk about local government issues here in terms of day-to-day organisation. Grand principles such as those proposed in legislation to outlaw the GLC and the metropolitan counties are, of course, quite right for this place. The detail, however, is not. [*Interruption.*] Lest I be misunderstood, I should make it clear that I welcome the reform of local government in London and I am a firm believer in the abolition of the GLC. Nevertheless, I believe that the Government should tread very carefully in handling the detail. I do not believe that there should be another elected authority for London. I entirely reject that, but the idea of another bottleneck of discussion without power in the shape of a committee in this place would also be a great mistake.

8.20 pm

Mr. Jim Callaghan (Heywood and Middleton): I am grateful for this opportunity to speak on the Queen's Speech. I wish to deal with the section which states:

"Legislation will be introduced for the better protection of food and the environment."

I welcome any legislation for the better protection of the environment.

Some years ago I was canvassing with a friend, Frank Aveyard in the Moss Side by-election campaign caused by the death of my great personal friend Frank Hatton, whose loss was shared by the whole House. When we knocked at a ground floor flat a young mother with a child came to the door. Having listened to our entreaties on behalf of our candidate she asked why she should vote for any politician—no doubt this experience is familiar to many hon. Members—and asked us to tell her of one thing that politicians had done for her. My reply was rather unusual. I asked whether she could tell me the correct time. She glanced over my shoulder at the clock on the tower of the Refuge insurance building in Manchester's Oxford street, a considerable distance from her home, and told me the time. She was naturally rather puzzled by my question. I explained to her, "That, madam, is what we politicians have done for you. Years ago you could not possibly have seen that clock from this distance."

I was able to say that because the Clean Air Act 1956 had been brought in, with the support of Members on both sides of the House. I told her that I well remembered the shroud of death that used to descend at the beginning of November, not just on Manchester but on every industrial city in Great Britain. Indeed, it killed many senior members of the population, including my own grandparents who, I believe, went to an early death due to the desperate attempts needed to breathe the foul smog —a mixture of smoke and fog—which descended on the area.

The Clean Air Act completely abolished the smog, enabling the lady whom I canvassed to see what we politicians had done for the community. I welcomed that Act, unaware that industrialists would be allowed to get away with practices not permitted for the average domestic fuel user. As stopping sulphur dioxide emissions would be very expensive for industry, they found a way round the problem by building tall chimneys. In my constituency there is a famous chimney known as the Schwabes chimney and I remember hearing as a boy the proud boast of Middletonians, which I could never understand, that we had the tallest chimney in Europe. That chimney was dwarfed by those built after the passing of the Clean Air Act. The policy was to tell industrialists to build tall chimneys and get rid of the sulphur dioxide into the higher atmosphere. I did not realise then that, in effect, we were simply exporting our dreadful smog to other countries.

On 30 July 1984 this year the Select Committee on the Environment produced its fourth report, dealing with acid rain. An Opposition Front Bench spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), invited me to accompany him and a delegation of Members from both sides of the House to visit Scandinavia to see the problems caused by acid rain—which, in my view, is one of the major hazards facing the industrialised world today. Enough is now known, however, to justify the development and application of technology to remove the causes of the effects now so abundantly apparent in Europe and America. The term "acid rain" was first used in 1872 to describe the atmospheric chemical process whereby sulphur dioxide emitted when coal is burnt falls as sulphuric acid in rain. Today it is used to describe the acid deposition caused by a number of pollutants emitted when fossil fuels are burnt.

The United Kingdom, unfortunately, is the largest producer of acid rain in western Europe. Although the CEGB is the main burner of fossil fuels in this country it has made virtually no reduction in its emissions of SO_2, the chemical formula by which acid rain is known. The tall stacks policy has lessened deposition close to power stations, causing the pollutants to be transported over great distances and increasing deposition in areas as remote as

[Mr. Jim Callaghan]

Norway and Sweden. Indeed, Great Britain is the principal foreign depositor of SO_2 in Scandinavia and by 1990 the United Kingdom will be the biggest single polluter of Swedish forests and lakes. Already we deposit 50 per cent. more pollutants in Norway than does any other country. The Government have the opportunity to reverse that state of affairs by implementing the EEC draft directive to reduce SO_2 emissions by 60 per cent. between 1980 and 1995, but will they do so?

During our visit to Norway and Sweden we considered the damage to freshwater life. In doing so we considered the research undertaken in Scandinavia. We found that the clearer the lake, the more poison it contained. Some were crystal-clear because they contained no fish or fauna whatever. The Norwegian state pollution authority told us that in an area of 13,000 sq kms covering four counties of southern Norway all the lakes were practically devoid of fish and in an additional area of 20,000 sq kms, which is 7,720 square miles, fish stocks were reduced. A separate survey showed that of 2,840 lakes 1,711 had lost their fish and in 941 fish stocks were declining. Losses were heaviest for brown trout. The Tovdal river, once a major salmon river, had not had a fish in it for 10 years. In southern Sweden, out of a total of 20,000 lakes, more than 18,000 had been acidified, 4,000 of them seriously enough to damage aquatic life.

Damage to forests was observed as early as the 1970s and a survey in 1982 showed, for instance, that 8 per cent. of the total forest area of West Germany was affected. A survey in 1983 showed that the proportion had increased to 34 per cent. and it was estimated that the figure for 1984 would be more than 50 per cent. Apart from the extent of the damage, one of the most disturbing features of acid rain damage is the suddenness with which it occurs and increases. Forest damage in Scandinavia and Europe is extensive, accelerating, and of immense economic significance.

Acid rain affects aquatic freshwater life, plants, trees, human health and historic buildings. Acid rainwater dissolves stonework. During the past 10 years £5 million have been spent on the restoration of the stonework of Westminster abbey. On the south face 44 flying buttresses, built only nine years ago, now require replacement because of SO_2 attack. Similar problems have been observed on the Palace of Westminster. Despite the 1956 Act, SO_2 levels in Westminster remain high and cause surface powdering, blistering and spalling.

Each year £1·5 million is spent on Cologne cathedral in West Germany to replace damaged stone. They are replacing a medieval monument with a copy. The renovation of stonework of historic buildings in West Germany costs about £80 million a year. Official sources put the total cost of stone repair at more than £1,000 million a year.

Despite all the evidence from European countries, there appears to be little anxiety in the United Kingdom about the effect of acid rain on fish, plants, trees and buildings. Why is that so? A reporter for the popular press said:

"When acid rain burns babies, then it's news. Otherwise don't bother us."

Those words reveal the attitude of one section of the popular press to acid rain, and partially explain the difference of perception of the phenomenon between the United Kingdom and the continent.

Widespread anxiety about acid rain deposition has not yet found significant expression in the United Kingdom. The reason for that is probably complex, and may include our geographical position and the funding and organisation of our scientific research. However, we should be worried about our emission of SO_2 because the United Kingdom is the largest emitter of SO_2 in the whole of Western Europe. We emit 5,120,000 tonnes a year. Italy emits 4,400,000 a year, West Germany emits 3,620,000 a year and France emits 3,600,000 a year. Between 1980 and 1990 United Kingdom emissions are projected to fall by only 5 per cent. In West Germany they are projected to fall by 60 per cent. by 1988. In many other countries they are projected to fall by 30 per cent. by 1985.

We export 70 per cent. of our emissions. Half of it falls on the sea and 20 per cent. is deposited in other countries, principally in Scandinavia. Therefore, we are the worst polluter in Western Europe.

Technology exists to achieve SO_2 emission reductions of 90 per cent. or more. There is a considerable market in Europe for emission control technology. The Select Committee's report recommends further encouragement for the development of British technology through the national Coal Board and the Central Electricity Generating Board, and grants towards development costs from the Department of Trade and Industry. I welcome that. It also stated that the quickest way to reduce SO_2 emissions is by retrofitting power stations. Although the technology is costly and difficult, it is available, and we saw it in Norway. The report recommends that the United Kingdom should join those European countries that have agreed to cut emissions by 30 per cent. immediately.

I strongly recommend that the Government also make a long-term commitment to further air pollution research to produce a more fundamental strategy based on energy conservation. The solution to the problem is needed urgently. We must not procrastinate.

8.34 pm

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I shall speak on that part of the Gracious Speech which deals with local authorities and Government. Local authorities are in the business of providing services which they are under a statutory duty to provide. The Goverment should be in the business of reducing those duties of local authorities, not increasing them. Local authorities are under obligation to provide those services economically and to provide value for money. They are not in the business of promoting their own mini macro-economic schemes, of grant-aiding ever minority interest group that they can find, nor of running advertising campaigns. They are in the business of providing efficient, cost-effective, local services, which they have a statutory duty to provide for those whom they serve.

Local authorities should examine those areas of their operations to find where they can obtain the best and cheapest service form the private sector. Those areas include refuse collection, street cleaning, garden and parks maintenance, social service laundry maintenance, vehicle maintenance and housing maintenance. They should invite tenders for the performance of those services and accept the lowest tender submitted. Local authorities must provide value for money and must not behave like municipal Prussians. They must not be insensitive to local views and demands or run vast bureaucracies whose vested interest is self-expansion.

Local authorities play an increasingly important role in employment and the level of unemployment. It must be appreciated that high rates affect jobs. I find increasingly extraordinary the statements of leaders of Labour councils that high rates do not affect jobs and have little or no effect on employment.

My constituency is serviced by Humberside county council. In one year it increased the rates by 61 per cent. and imposed a supplementary rate. It moved from being one of the lowest rated to one of the highest rated authorities, and increased its establishment from 36,000 to 40,000 people. The Labour leader of that authority wrote to me saying that there was no demonstrable evidence that high rate policies had effects on unemployment or employment.

As a result of this Government's policies there will be no more supplementary rates, and no more 61 per cent. rate increases. The ratepayers of Humberside have been saved from that sort of lunacy. Meanwhile the rates on a small house in Scunthorpe exceed those paid in some London boroughs — admittedly Tory-controlled boroughs. High rates prevent investment, drive firms away, and put firms out of business. That adds up to fewer jobs and more unemployment. I had the privilege to serve on Wandsworth borough council. It has the lowest rates in inner London and, consequently, one of the lowest rates of unemployment.

On the subject of rates, will the Secretary of State tell the House what he proposes to do about water rates? Those who live in the Anglian region have the misfortune to pay the highest water rates in the country. A widow who lives alone, pays the same rate as is paid on a house full of people who are earning, when the properties are similar. Is it not possible to introduce a rate rebate in respect of water rates? Can we introduce legislation to cap water rates and to make water authorities answerable to public demand?

My constituency has three enterprise zones, development area status and access to European money, and we have the prospect of increasing employment if we exploit those resources carefully. But with unemployment of more than 21 per cent. it is essential that the constituency retains its development area status or, preferably, when the regional map is redrawn, is given special development area status.

While I have the opportunity, may I draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport the important role that the Trent wharves play in my constituency? Compared with 10 years ago, when little use was made of the wharves, the private sector is increasingly using them. In that way the private sector can get round the inefficient port of Hull, where union intransigence, the national dock labour scheme and sheer bloody-mindedness have seen the slow death of a once great port.

We now have about 10 wharves on the Trent handling several million tonnes of produce a year. There is the prospect of doubling the amount of wharves by using the agricultural land abutting the river Trent. That would create several hundred more jobs and provide the customer with what he wants, which is speed, efficiency and a cost-effective means of getting his goods in and out of the country. Any mention of this causes the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to threaten a public inquiry, because grade 1 agricultural land will be affected. I ask my right hon. Friend to consider that and to advise Glandford borough council as to how the proper development of the Trent wharves can be encouraged. They are a national resource that should be available to the country. I remind my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that, in its draft structure plan, Humberside county council has dismissed the proposal, which means that there is the danger that we shall be cut off from any European regional development fund money to develop the port infrastructure.

I welcome the proposals to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan authorities, but I want to know why the Secretary of State has victimised my constituency. Why has he not introduced proposals to abolish Humberside and Avon county councils? Those estuarial authorities, created in 1974, remain unpopular and have not been a success, and it is about time that their futures were reviewed. My constituency is run by Hull county councillors, who do not have the interests of south Humberside at heart. My side of the county has been starved of investment. The council is too big, too remote and inefficient. The people of Lincolnshire want Lincolnshire brought back, and the people of Yorkshire want the re-establishment of the East Riding of Yorkshire. If we could only get the names back, it would be something, but it is about time that Avon and Humberside councils were abolished.

8.43 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I must take up remarks made by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) and by the Secretary of State for the Environment, both of whom should have known better. They referred to organisations in my constituency that deal with the police, but they have clearly confused two completely separate organisations. The first organisation referred to was Islington council's police committee, which is an admirable body on which I serve as a co-opted member, and which has done much good work during the past two and a half years, especially on crime on council estates and the problems of heroin addiction among young people.

The second organisation, which was mentioned in a chance remark by the Secretary of State, is a police monitoring organisation that offers assistance to people who have complaints about their treatment by the police. In recent days, that organisation has attracted some bad publicity over the actions of one employee. Nothing has yet been proved, and until proved guilty, an individual must be regarded as innocent. However, questions have been raised, rightly and properly, and a thorough investigation is under way. I hope that the Secretary of State will think more carefully before he makes such a chance and snide remark again.

There was not a single word in the Queen's Speech, or in the speech of the Secretary of State, about housing. One would have thought that the omission of such a central and crucial area of Government policy meant that the Government were completely satisfied with housing conditions. They seem to believe that the miserable measures that they introduced last year—the Housing and Building Control Act and the Housing Defects Act —are sufficient to answer all the housing problems of the country and especially of my constituency. Of course that is not the case.

One would have thought from the Government's silence on housing that there was no housing crisis. One would have thought that no people came week after week

[Mr. Chris Smith]

to my constituency surgery with desperate housing problems that only a major programme of investment in housing can begin to solve. One would have thought that the family I visited last week in their flat did not exist. They have four children of different sexes, whose ages range between seven and 20, who sleep in one bedroom. The family is cooped up in that over-crowded and cramped flat and cannot move simply because no accommodation of the right size is available. One would have thought from the Government's silence about housing, and especially bad and inadequate housing, that those people's needs did not exist.

Neither the Queen's Speech nor the Secretary of State's speech said anything about the scandalous lack of proper investment in housing construction over which the Government have presided. There was no mention of the projected £600 million cut in housing investment programme allocations which the Chancellor of the Exchequer is widely reported as being about to announce. There was no mention of the further tinkering with the rules about the way in which local authorities can use their capital receipts, which it is widely reported will be uppermost in the Chancellor's mind when he reaches for his axe on public spending during the next few weeks.

The speeches said nothing about the impact of rate-capping measures on the ability of local authorities properly to maintain and repair their housing stocks, which are too often inadequately maintained and in desperate need of attention. The speeches said nothing about the way in which the Government have manipulated the subsidy system for public housing so that local authority housing revenue accounts are now in surplus, with tenants paying enormously high rents to subsidise the ratepayers of those areas. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet), who claims with surprising pride to have been a member of Wandsworth borough council, should consider the rents that tenants in Wandsworth must pay and the inadequate services that they receive in return. He should perhaps think about their needs as well as those of others whom the Wandsworth council claims to serve.

None of the major housing problems which face people in my constituency were mentioned in the Queen's Speech or in any of the Government speeches. However, one measure is reported in the Queen's Speech which will affect housing in my constituency — the proposal to abolish the GLC. There are many reasons why I passionately oppose the Government's intentions in this respect, but I wish to dwell on the specific area of housing and the GLC's remaining housing responsibilities which will be dismembered if it goes.

One must also remember that, through using their Back Benchers to table amendments to the Greater London Council (Money) Bill, the Government have already profoundly affected much of the capital housing work scheduled by the GLC around London and in my constituency. Just a week ago at a tenants' meeting, I was asked what had happened to the environmental improvement work on an estate which was supposed to begin this year. The answer was that that work which had been arrived at in concert with the tenants — and to which they are still looking forward — fell with the changes to that Bill which were introduced by Conservative Members.

If the GLC goes, many other problems will come in train. I want to ask five specific questions, which I know the Secretary of State for Transport will be unable to answer. He is even unable to answer questions on transport, but these questions on housing will pose an even greater problem for him. I therefore ask him to pass them on to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, and I hope that I shall receive answers.

How will access to the seaside and country homes which the GLC at present owns outside London be guaranteed for Londoners after the GLC goes? Many elderly people in my constituency and elsewhere in London will be deprived of a real opportunity if no guarantees are given about access to that available accommodation.

Secondly, what will happen to the housing investment programme allocation which is at present made available to the GLC from the Government and used for the transferred ex-GLC housing stock in the various boroughs? Will the borough allocations be increased accordingly if the GLC goes?

Thirdly, what role will be played by the borough councils or anyone after the disappearance of the GLC to meet the needs of the single homeless in London, when only the GLC and a handful of borough councils are at present tackling the real problems that exist? At present, the GLC spends more money in London than the Government do in the country as a whole in the funding of hostels for single homeless people and the running expenses of providing that desperately needed accommodation. What will happen to that accommodation and the needs of those people when the GLC goes?

Fourthly, what will happen to the housing research role, as well as to housing needs and conditions in London, when the GLC goes?

Fifthly, what will happen to the need for strategic planning of housing resources in London as a whole? That highlights as a microcosm the whole problem of the abolition of a cross-London authority which at present can look at things on a London-wide basis. If all the powers and decision-making functions of the GLC are transferred downwards to the boroughs or outwards to quangos or joint boards, no elected authority will be carrying out any strategic planning work for the capital city.

Those five questions highlight the problems which will face the boroughs and people in housing need in London if the abolition of the GLC goes ahead. This proposal will be deeply damaging to the needs of the people of London and my constituency. It will heap greater injustice on top of the existing unfairness of the Government's housing policies. Just like housing policy as a whole, it will ignore completely the needs of the homeless, the badly housed, those who are patiently waiting for accommodation and even the needs of owner-occupiers who are suffering from problems in accommodation which they purchased and which is now proving less than ideal.

The Government's policies on housing and the abolition of the GLC completely ignore the needs of Londoners, my constituents and the people for whom the Government are supposed to be working.

8.56 pm

Sir Ian Percival (Southport): The temptation to reply to some of the spurious and tendentious propositions of Opposition Members is almost irresistible, but I have two good reasons for resisting it. One is time, and the other is

that I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend will answer the five questions put by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) together with all the other points that have been raised.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) is not in his place. It is not that I wish to answer all his points about doom and gloom—we have differed about those often enough—but rather that I share his concern about the increase in heroin taking in that area. All of us, including the Government, have a great responsibility to do what we can to fight it, but I totally repudiate the idea that that increase is the Government's responsibility.

I welcome the delightful sentence—the shortest but most important—in the Queen's Speech, which reads:

"A Bill will be introduced to abolish the Greater London Council and the metropolitan county councils".

Much has been said about the GLC, but not so much about the metropolitan county councils. As my right hon. Friend knows, we in Southport greatly welcome this commitment. We look forward greatly to the promised early return to a situation in which our district is the unit of local government for us, and we are responsible directly to our constituents, on the one hand, and to the Secretary of State, on the other. We are looking forward to getting this burden off our backs. My right hon. Friend will have the full support of my constituency, and my full support as the representative of it, in the passage of the Bill.

Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave some details of the amount of money being spent by the GLC in fighting a political battle at the expense of the ratepayer. I wish to draw to my right hon. Friend's attention the fact that the Merseyside county council is doing the same thing. I do not know how much it is spending, as I do not have the figures, but we all know that a full-page advertisement in a daily newspaper costs a lot of money. My constituents find it difficult enough to find money that the Merseyside county council is spending more or less with propriety. They consider it outrageous, and so do I, that they should now be called upon to find extra money to finance this political campaign.

I dare say that the Merseyside county council has taken legal advice and has a way of avoiding the responsibility. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to take notice of the fact that the Merseyside county council is spending money in the same way as the GLC. Will they make inquiries as to how much the council is spending and whether it is legitimate expenditure that the council can incur within the law?

With those few words, I wish my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench the best of luck with the Bill, and I hope that we get it through very soon.

Mr. Penhaligon: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our debate today has not been specific. I have been here for 10 years and have witnessed several debates on the Queen's Speech, and I know that they are not specific in content. However, I should appreciate some guidance as to when a party polling some 4 million votes was not given one second in such a debate, despite the fact that the hon. Member who was to be the spokesman has been here throughout the debate and would have liked a chance to argue the rural transport case, which the Secretary of State for Transport will no doubt admit has not been aired throughout today's debate. That seems a tragedy, and I suspect that rural transport will affect more people than the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I understand the hon. Gentleman's resentment, and I regret that he was not able to catch my eye. He would have been able to had some hon. Members made rather shorter speeches than they did. For hon. Members to make speeches of 20 minutes when other hon. Members are waiting to speak is not being fair, and I hope that hon. Members will bear it in mind, but I have to take many factors into account when deciding which hon. Members I shall call.

Mr. Penhaligon: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I recognise your difficulty, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but can you confirm that the Labour party was given 30 minutes to open the debate and will have 30 minutes to close it, whereas the alliance opposition's contribution to the debate has been 13 minutes?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I cannot enter into such a dialogue with any hon. Member. The facts will be obvious both from what the Doorkeeper records and from what will be printed in the *Official Report* tomorrow morning.

9.2 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): When the present Government were in opposition, before 1979, they specialised in producing a particular kind of fiction, which was called, in general terms, "a number of transport reports". The Secretary of State for Transport was involved in many of the discussions that took place then, not necessarily on transport, but on attempts to turn the clock back in legislation on practically every subject.

It is important to note, in a Queen's Speech that has two major innovations on transport, that it is the Secretary of State for Transport who believes most fervently that we should privatise public transport. I agree that the Secretary of State understands public transport. I do not accept the theory that he believes that public transport is something that brings the gardeners to the door of the estate. I know that he knows that it is something of importance to every one of us.

However, many of the Secretary of State's views have a slightly Marie Antoinette aspect. For example, he appears to be saying, through the Queen's Speech that even if there are no buses, one can always take a taxi. The changes that he is proposing have one thing in common with many of the Bills that he has already brought before the House as Secretary of State for Transport. That is that this massive change to do with deregulation of public transport, the creation of a cowboys' charter, the wrecking of the National Bus Company, are all based on a report that was put together by the Adam Smith Institute. The main contributor to that report was a man whose private bus company went bankrupt. That sums up the Government's entire attitude towards public transport.

First, we have a White Paper on buses. Secondly, we are told that legislation will be brought in based entirely on trial areas. Therefore, it is important that we should look at the whole programme of trial areas and try to understand how it is that the Government can possibly have come to the conclusion, after five years of chipping away at the foundations of public transport, that this will be the year of the great give-away. In effect, the Secretary

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

of State is going to hand over control of public transport to anybody who thinks that they can run it on the basis of making a quick buck here and there.

The main experimental evidence for the White Paper plans was based, after the Transport Act 1980, on 10 local authorities which were to consider the idea of new trial means of transport. Only three authorities — Devon, Hereford and Norfolk — set up schemes. Hereford decided to scrap all subsidies and then no company tendered for any of the 53 rural routes and only four operators came forward, one of which had its licence revoked. A second company had its licence limited before it was renewed.

In Norfolk, the subsidies were kept but there was little change. The Transport Road Research laboratory — a Government laboratory—said:

"it is clear that the changes are due to financial restriction and not to deregulation."

The Eastern Counties bus company, which is part of the National Bus Company and still the major provider of bus transport in Norfolk, put up its fares 10 per cent. and cut its services.

The third area to run a trial was Devon. Of that experiment, the White Paper says:

"results of this exercise were disappointing, with substantial reductions in services not leading to the anticipated savings in revenue support."

In other words, of the three experimental areas, which were being used as an excuse for a major change, not one could produce evidence of the benefits to anybody that we are told will follow from this massive change.

The Federation of Public Passenger Transport Employers said that the Hereford price cuts would produce instability in transport because they ignored the need for cash to buy new buses and to replace existing stock. It suggests that the reality of the economics is that there will need to be a 25 per cent. increase in fares if the company is to remain viable.

We should look at some other aspects of those experiments, because they are instructive. Hereford showed the dangers of what happens when private enterprise comes in looking not for the public service element but for a way of making easy money.

When the Flashes company lost its licence, 47 maintenance defects were discovered in its existing transport. Twenty-seven of those defects were immediate, which means that they could have had an effect upon any one of the buses at any moment — buses that are carrying members of the public.

The Traffic Commissioners — the arbiters of those decisions—will now be merged with the road haulage licensors. On 12 July, the Minister of State told Transport 2000 at a press conference that there would not be any extra financial problems because the manpower involved would be less than it is at present.

We should understand the effect of the end of road licensing. In the Transport Act 1980, coaches on journeys over 30 miles were freed from regulations. The National Bus Company miles came down from 543 million to 274 million between 1980 and 1982.

The new scheme extends those 1980 requirements to give a licence to anyone who wants one as long as it is not against the public interest. But there are very grave doubts about whether that definition will be adhered to. It is highly likely that there will not be adequate restrictions on the driver's hours. We have already been told that there could be a fiftyfold increase in the number of operators. However, that may be an initial reaction and there is no evidence whatever that that number of companies will remain viable in the long run.

It is certain that, if there are to be fewer people monitoring the safety records, it will be very difficult to enforce safety standards. More important, competition in profitable areas means that the viability of a company can be undercut by having to compete on routes on which it would normally expect to make money. Inevitably all the companies will go for those routes that are already popular and other areas such as rural transport will be affected disastrously.

The Government seem to believe that there is, in some odd way, a political reason for doing away with cross-subsidisation. Anyone who has anything to do with transport knows very well that not only bus operators but other transport authorities rely heavily on the cross-subsidisation between one service and another in order to balance their books. The Government do not accept that. They oppose cross-subsidy from one route to another, but they never discuss, in any sense, the cross-subsidy that takes place between one type of fare and another. What about the cross-subsidisation between child and adult fares, weekend and weekday fares or between the fares for those who travel in the rush hour and those who travel during off-peak hours?

Are we to believe that those who want to travel on less popular services at more difficult hours, or those who are schoolchildren will not in future be entitled to any form of adequate bus service? Deregulation would allow an operator to run buses just in the rush hour. Even in the experimental areas we saw the result of that — great competition on particular routes but hardly any attempt to provide services in rural areas.

It is ironic that the Government, who for many years have pretended to represent the rural communities, should now make a consistent and concerted attack upon the services in those areas. A large part of my constituency relies heavily on rural buses and those who live in the villages will now find themselves deprived of even their present fairly inadequate service. The Crossville bus company has estimated that at present it has 900 vehicles, but if this Bill is enacted, that number will fall to 300. The effect on the villages in rural Cheshire will be dramatic. Yet there is no attempt to discuss the implications, or even the wishes of the people in those areas.

I must tell the Secretary of State that it is not just Labour party councillors who are concerned about the provision of rural transport, but also the National Federation of Women's Institutes, parish councillors and many of the elected representatives who are themselves members of the Conservative party. They have made it plain that they think that the scheme is incredibly crazy and that they would not wish to see it enacted in any circumstances.

Certain authorities have proved that the way to make transport services effective is to run them as fully integrated services. The Tyne and Wear metro service works efficiently because it links buses with a metro. This year the Select Committee on Transport concluded—

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It might be helpful, Sir, if you took this opportunity to reiterate what Mr. Deputy Speaker said

just before you resumed the Chair — that, if hon. Members would limit their speeches to a reasonable length, many more hon. Members could be called.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) limited his remarks to 13 minutes. If the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) took the same time, other hon. Members could be called to speak before the debate ends.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman, who is a Whip, will understand that a limit has never been put on Front-Bench speeches.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The debate started nearly an hour late because of spurious points of order. Those of us who care about rural transport find such childish behaviour demonstrative of the level of politics in which the alliance indulges.

What do the Government intend to do about concessionary fares? Many elderly people can travel away from home only because they have concessionary bus passes. The different schemes operated by the various councils are already causing difficulty.

There is a ritual mention in the Queen's Speech of some concessionary fare system for the elderly and disabled, but no thought has been given to how it will be financed. Handing tokens to elderly people to be used on any bus that comes along is unreasonable. Concessionary fares already cause difficulties between authorities because of the different fares charged. There is no evidence that the Government have thought about the scheme so that private operators can provide suitable transport for the elderly.

The sufferers will be not only the disabled and those most in need of contact with shops and social facilities, but those who need transport to take their children to school and the schoolchildren themselves. London Regional Transport has already secretly decided to raise children's fares by 50 per cent. If that is repeated throughout the country, those most in need will be penalised under an unworkable scheme.

The rural areas will be so badly hit that the Government have decided that they must make a gesture in their direction. They suggest a donation of £1 million for special work. The National Federation of Women's Institutes, not known for its Socialist views, said that this represented no more than 100 minibuses. Those buses would have to provide across the country the level of transport now provided by a nationalised industry.

The second idea is that a subsidy of £20 million should be given during the first transitional year and that this should be reduced to £15 million in the second year, £10 million in the third, £5 million in the fourth and then be phased out. There is no hard and fast evidence that even such sums would compensate for the changes that the bus companies will have to accept under the new legislation.

The selling off of the National Bus Company is not only a devastating change for those who use public transport; it has never been argued, and it has no logic. The Transport Act 1982 made attempts to undermine the National Bus Company, but it failed. The operating profits of the company are now £47 million. In response, the Government have decided to break up the National Bus Company. Having broken it up, they intend to sell off the constituent parts. The stockbrokers Grieveson Grant and Co. have said that this would produce the least cash for the Government of all their give-away schemes. As usual, they will flog off any national asset that they find, but in this instance they will not even receive a suitable sum in return.

Cross-subsidisation will disappear and services which are unprofitable but which are needed by many, will go when the National Bus Company is broken up. There is no reason for the change proposed. The NBC is not a burden on the Government. It receives 14 per cent. of relevent subsidies but it runs 39 per cent. of the country's buses. The return on capital invested is 17 per cent.— one that many Conservative business men would be happy to have. The NBC received £140 million in subsidy but £38 million of that was for concessionary fares. We have already been told by the Government that the subsidy for concessionary fares will not be cut. If we subtract the £57 million of historic debts, we find that £45 million is left.

There is no logic in destroying an efficient and useful service for sheer and unimaginative dogma. The NBC's productivity increased per employee from 11,600 miles per employee in 1982 to 11,900 in 1983. However, none of these facts concerns the Government. Their attitude is that, if a nationalised company works, is efficient and provides a service, it is their task to destroy it.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Will the hon. Lady comment on the statement by Lord Shepherd, the chairman of the National Bus Company, on cross-subsidisation? He said in the NBC's most recent report:

"In many areas cross-subsidy is being taken to the point where the benefits obtained in meeting certain social objectives have been outweighed by the long-term damage being inflicted on the future performance of routes now suffering from overpricing and going into premature decline."

Mrs. Dunwoody: That does not destroy the case for cross-subsidisation. The hon. Gentleman will rapidly find in his constituency that those who do not live on the most populated routes will explain the theory of cross-subsidisation to him in considerable detail once the proposed legislation is implemented.

The district councils will be very much affected by the proposed change in the law. They will be forced to turn their bus operations into private companies. Having done so, they will probably be sold off as independent parts. If not, the councils will still have to tender for any non-profitable routes. The metropolitan counties will first form passenger transport authorities, which will replace the present passenger transport executives, and then they will have to make plans to break up the companies that they have created. That will be incredibly inefficient and expensive as well as unacceptable.

If the Secretary of State thinks that it is only for dogmatic reasons that we oppose the proposed changes, I remind him of some of the responses of other interested parties. The National Bus Company has stated:

"deregulation will increase this level of inadequacy to grotesque levels."

The National Federation of Women's Organisations reports:

"we are disturbed that legislation to deregulate almost the entire bus industry is being based on three small experiments."

It is the opinion of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities that we

"risk wasteful competition in the profitable areas and reduced services elsewhere."

What are the Government's answers to these complaints? They say, in effect, "If you do not have buses you must use taxis." They intend to increase the number

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

taxis plying for hire and they will allow separate fares to be charged for carrying more than one passenger. In case anyone imagines that that will meet with the approval of taxi drivers, I quote what was said by John Oswell, secretary of the National Federation of Taxicab Associations. He said:

"This will be a disaster for the taxi trade. The Government will propose provisions to relax progressively restrictions on the numbers of taxis which operate in some areas".

The economics of the proposal is so bizarre that cabs which cost 95p per mile to run will replace buses which cost 16p per mile. We have to remember that 75 per cent. of the people cannot afford to travel by taxi, and with a growing number of unemployed it is clear that yet again we are faced with a bizarre suggestion.

Unfortunately, the proposed changes will not only affect the bus industry. On 16 October the Government announced that the TSG would no longer be available. The suggestion is that, somehow or other, in future the cash will come from local authorities' rate support grants.

Throughout the debate we have heard of the impossibility of local authorities being able to maintain their existing levels of services, whether in housing, social services or education. Yet now we are told that there is no need to worry, that we can do away with the transport subsidy, and that in future the money will come from the rate support grant. What utter, stinking hypocrisy. With rate capping there will be no possibility whatever of local authorities replacing the money——

Mr. Hayward *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: "Stinking" is not an unparliamentary word, if that is what the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) was about to say.

Mrs. Dunwoody: It may not be unparliamentary but, by goodness, it goes home. The Government intend to rate-cap authorities to such an extent that there will be no question of the revenue being made up to provide the bus and rail services—and the effect will be immediate.

In 1983, British Rail received £80 million from the TSG in the metropolitan areas. That is 10 per cent. of the money that British Rail needs to run its services. In Manchester, it is now expected that as a result there will be a cut of 25 per cent. in rail services. Those who live in the greater Manchester area will feel the immediate effect. It will be yet another nail in the economics of British Rail.

By contrast, we know what the Labour party can do when it is given the opportunity to provide the services needed by the general public. London Transport officers calculated that an extra £10 million subsidy in 1985-86 would produce £12·5 million benefits in fares. When the fares on the underground were reduced by 25 per cent., the use of the services increased very considerably. In addition there were 3,000 fewer accidents than in a normal year, and there was an 8 per cent. fall in the use of cars.

It is extraordinary that a party which cares so much about road transport never makes public the fact that if the underground services and the bus services are running efficiently, it is far easier for drivers to find room on the roads to use their vehicles.

Tyne and Wear produced a 63·7 million increase in passenger journeys. It demonstrates that the public want efficient transport and will use it when it is at very low rates. Increasingly they have shown their response to an imaginative fares policy. South Yorkshire put another 3 million passengers on to its buses by using a low fare structure.

The cuts in the metropolitan county grants will have a direct effect. Tyne and Wear reports that the recent changes will mean a 25 to 30 per cent. cut in the next three years. There will be a cut of 25 per cent. of 99 million passenger boardings over the network. Redundancy pay for the staff who lose their jobs will amount to £8 million. All those effects come from a desire to cut subsidies from £29·5 million to £15·8 million.

Let the Government tell us tonight what they intend to do about concessionary fares. Let us hear from them how they genuinely think this hotchpotch of nonsense can protect the elderly, the young or those who at present need the concessionary fare system. Above all, let them tell us how they justify an idea that will deprive the rural areas of any sort of efficient bus service, make many of the town services unviable and lead in a very short time to the decimation of a system of public transport that has been the pride of many people in this country.

American companies have come here from Dallas to look at the level of service provided in areas such as Tyne and Wear. What will the Secretary of State say to them? Will it be: "We are very sorry, the Conservative Government have at last admitted that they care little for the old or for those who do not have their own cars, and even less for the provision of an efficient public transport system."?

9.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): It is my pleasant duty to congratulate the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and welcome her to her new responsibilities in transport on the Opposition Front Bench. She is an old enemy and an old friend. I am sure that we shall have many pleasant teach-ins arranged for her on transport matters.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am sure that the Secretary of State will learn.

Mr. Ridley: I gather that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) will remain, which means that we shall have two National Union of Railwaymen-sponsored Front Bench spokesmen on transport. Having listened to the hon. Lady's speech, I must tell her that I wanted to go to Birmingham, and she has taken me to Crewe.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) made an earnest and sincere speech at the opening of the debate. I noted with approval the care that he took to dissociate himself from the imprudent comments about selective illegality by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). The hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) compounded the error by suggesting that local government was put in a position in which it had to break one law or another. I do not think that we can have selective illegality. I say to the hon. Member for Bootle that many councils have succeeded, in equally difficult circumstances, in living within their means. There is no cause for overspending to maintain the law.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Copeland on being firm enough at least to go that far with his colleagues. I am also pleased that he was able to welcome the inquiry that the Government propose to hold into the current

practices and procedures of local authorities. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will shortly consult him and representatives of the alliance on the way in which that inquiry will proceed. However, the House will not expect me to agree with the remainder of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. For example, with regard to the abolition Bill, he sought to cast doubt on the savings that will be made with the dissappearance of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House this afternoon that the savings from elimination of duplication alone will be substantial, but his more detailed estimate will be available when the Bill is published.

I should like to underline what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Southport (Sir I. Percival) said, that the savings from political spending alone will be pretty considerable. I shall quote two figures for savings that will be made in transport. This year, the GLC is giving £122,000 to an organisation called Transport for an Improved City and £235,480 to an organisation called Capital. These organisations indulge in scaremongering to try to deceive Londoners about the Government's intentions on transport. Saving such expenditure will be a bonus.

It is also odd that the Opposition should place so much stress on the need for an inquiry into our policy of abolition. When the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) was Opposition spokesman on the environment, speaking at the 1983 local government conference he said—as my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) has reminded us:

> "We shall therefore legislate to create unitary district authorities which will be responsible for all of the functions in their area that they can sensibly undertake".

My hon. Friend did not complete the quotation. The right hon. Gentleman continued:

> "We shall set up no more inquiries. We shall legislate".

How can it be right for the Labour party to say that it will make its local government reforms without further inquiries, but to insist that the Government should have an inquiry? My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Southport and my hon. Friends the Members for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) and for Surbiton, as well as others of my hon. Friends on the Back Benches, feel that the time has come to proceed with the Bill. They feel that we should not waste any more time.

The hon. Member for Copeland referred to the GLC proposal for a lorry ban. As I have said, that is a decision of a quite different order. It is an administrative decision. Many of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn), are strongly opposed to it. However, it is not an issue on which the House will be asked to legislate; it is an administrative decision in which the House will have no say. It must be right that in decisions not to be taken by the House there should be public inquiry procedures. I have repeatedly told the GLC that a public inquiry will provide a well-established democratic way of subjecting such a major proposal to impartial assessment by an independent inspector. If the Government can hold proper public inquiries for road schemes, why should not the GLC do so on a proposal of such importance? When I challenged the hon. Member for Copeland, he said that the Opposition are all in favour of holding public inquiries on matters such as that. Will he now write to the GLC and say that, as spokesman for the Labour party, he believes that there should be a public inquiry so that all the facts and figures may be properly considered and the costs and benefits properly analysed?

Finally, we have heard, yet again, complaints about increased centralisation and the breakdown of the relationship between central Government and local government as a result of rate limitation. May I correct those assertions? It is the consensus that has broken down —the convention accepted by local authorities in the past that in a unitary rather than a federal state, central Government are entitled to lay down financial guidelines within which local government operates. It was because certain extravagant and high-spending authorities had flouted that convention that rate limitation became necessary. Within the overall expenditure levels set for rate-limited authorities, it will remain for locally elected councillors to decide on priorities within and between services. There is no question of a Whitehall takeover.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I hope that my right hon. Friend will not leave the subject of local government without answering my specific question.

Mr. Ridley: I have the answer to the specific question of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg). The Government are actively assessing the best way forward in the difficult matter he raised, which concerns a long-established provision in planning law affecting different interests in different ways. My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction is considering the matter and will be in touch with my hon. Friend.

My right hon. Friend has explained to the House why the Government consider that the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils—an unnecessary and extravagant tier of local government—will enable the services that they provide, or in some cases fail to provide, to be more economically and efficiently provided. That is particularly true of transport services. On the highways and traffic management side there is substantial duplication. The London boroughs and most of the metropolitan districts have considerable and long experience in these matters. They often resent the pettifogging interference of the upper-tier authorities. That is an area in which I, too, expect substantial manpower savings, about which the House will hear in due course

Of course there will be a need for co-operation among the boroughs and districts to ensure that their roads programmes and traffic management policies are sensibly co-ordinated. I see no reason to doubt that the type of co-operation will be the normal rule, although I shall have reserve powers to ensure that wider traffic interests are taken into account. I think that perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground) gives us too much credit for honesty in that respect. I suspect that those powers will seldom, if ever, be necessary.

In the metropolitan counties we accept the need to provide a continuing mechanism for decisions on a county-wide basis—for instance, on the provision of subsidy for socially necessary but unprofitable services. That is why we shall provide for joint passenger authorities with members appointed by the constituent districts. That reverts to the previous arrangements which worked perfectly satisfactorily. Those joint boards are not quangos. They will consist of district councillors directly responsible to their own councils, and so, in turn, to the ratepayers.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Will there be concessionary fares?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Member keeps talking about concessionary fares. The arrangements whereby concessionary fares are paid at the discretion of local authorities will remain untouched. Throughout the abolition process and whatever I seek to do about bus policy, it will remain for them to do what they think is right about concessionary fares.

Mr. Penhaligon: In some rural areas there are a number of private entrepreneurs who run, with little or no subsidy, small networks which provide a good and efficient service. They are terrified that they are about to lose their mini-monopoly. Is there any risk that in the legislation the operators will lose the monopoly and that these small businesses that have served the community well will suddenly find themselves in enormous financial difficulties?

Mr. Ridley: I shall be saying a great deal about buses and I should like to answer the hon. Gentleman's question when I reach that point.

The Government have been pursuing a consistent policy of opening transport services to competition. The interests of the consumer must come first. He must have freedom of choice. Competition ensures that the consumer can choose the best services and the best prices. It also has the effect of forcing operators to provide services at keen fares. We accept competition in other areas; why not in transport?

The Labour Government made the road haulage industry fully competitive. In 1980, long-distance express bus services were deregulated. The predicted disasters did not happen. In fact, the number of long-distance coach services has increased by 50 per cent. Standards have increased and fares have gone down by an average of 40 per cent. in real terms. There has been no jeopardising of safety standards.

The Government have also set about providing competition in air services wherever competition can be fair and Britain's interests are not prejudiced. Hon. Members are aware of the dramatic improvement in domestic services that competition has brought about. The north Atlantic, Hong Kong and Holland are examples. When we achieved a liberal air regime with the Dutch, fares came down by one third and demand increased. It was good for all. We are determined to bring competition into all European air travel as fast as we can. Our White Paper on civil aviation is designed to ensure that we will have the maximum number of healthy competitors as we open these markets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) spoke at length about airports policy. I do not have time to discuss airports policy today, but I suspect that the House will return to the subject on several occasions. Indeed, there will probably be plenty of opportunities in the future to discuss the air industry.

We are also moving to a more competitive environment for ports. My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet) referred to the Trent wharves. I assure him that the Department welcomes investment in port facilities wherever they occur and there are no controls that we seek to place on them. I noted his comments about the planning difficulties encountered by his constituents and I will relay them to my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who seem to be most concerned. We will certainly see what we can do to help.

In shipping, we believe that we must do everything possible to maintain a fair, competitive international market. We face problems of subsidy and protectionism all over the world and our shipping industry is having an extremely difficult time. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is at this very moment addressing a dinner of the General Council of British Shipping. He has some hopeful things to say and much evidence of what the Government have done to try to help that industry.

I never understand why the Opposition cannot see, after all that I have said, the clear and obvious benefits that competition brings. The results in transport alone are quite dramatic. Yet the Opposition oppose the extension of competition every time, as we heard today from the hon. Members for Burnley (Mr. Pike) and for Crewe and Nantwich. Once more, we shall have to take the Labour party through the well-rehearsed arguments that it is the customer who matters, not the operators, and that competition is what helps the customer. One day the Opposition will realise that the reason for their ever-shrinking base of electoral support is that they have always put the unions before the customers, and they are still doing it even now.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Would the right hon. Gentleman care to quote the views of Viscount Ridley on the proposed changes? Is he aware that that previous chairman of a county council said that the scheme was totally unacceptable?

Mr. Ridley: The extent to which the Opposition increasingly rely on the other place to save their bacon never ceases to amaze me.

Returning to the buses, in the light of the undoubted benefits that flow from competition the Government have brought in proposals for stage buses. Throughout our many and long debates on the legislation the House should remember that it is the ratepayers and passengers who will benefit from the policy, and that is the reason for it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East welcomed our policy and I am grateful for that, but he wondered why there was such a short time for consultation. There have been seven consultative documents. I will send copies of the relevant ones to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich as clearly she has not read them. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East should not forget that there will also be a very long Committee stage, which is probably the best form of consultation. Moreover, a balance must be struck between consultation and uncertainty in the industry. The sooner these matters are brought into effect, the sooner benefits will flow and the better it will be.

Regarding the bus industry, first, it is a fact that revenue support for the industry was increased from £10 million in 1972 to more than £500 million in 1982. Secondly, the unit costs of the bus industry in real terms have increased by about 20 per cent. over the same period. Thirdly, the costs of the private sector are at least 30 to 40 per cent. below the costs of public sector operators. As the White Paper says:

"Leaving London aside, if costs were to fall by 15 per cent. —which is less than the increase since 1970 in the unit costs of public sector operators—the saving would be over £200 million a year."

That compares with the total cost of revenue support outside London of about £350 million.

Therefore, if we can achieve those potential cost reductions, we can do with less subsidy, while providing similar levels of service and benefiting the passenger. Moreover, if we bring fares down, patronage will increase, leading to more income from the fare box, not less. Experience tells us that standards of service will also improve.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich talked about cross-subsidy. I object to cross-subsidy because it caused excessively high fares on many busy routes, as one of my hon. Friends pointed out when he quoted Lord Shepherd. That caused a loss of passengers and, therefore, a loss of income to the fare box, and further decline. This point will appeal to the hon. Lady.

Cross-subsidy is also unfair. I suspect that the direction of the flows of cross-subsidy in the bus industry are from the industrial north to the rural south. They are certainly from the city centre to the suburbs, and are probably from urban areas to rural areas. They are, therefore, from the poor to the rich. I never realised that the hon. Lady was in favour of a policy of hidden cross-subsidies from the poor to the rich. That is exactly what she seeks to defend. Perhaps she has more to learn about the bus industry than she thinks.

I wish to draw attention to the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for contracting-out local authority services. They were warmly welcomed by my hon. Friends the Members for Bournemouth, East and for Glanford and Scunthorpe. They are important proposals. Vehicle maintenance, refuse collection and cleaning will have to be put out to tender and the lowest offer will have to be accepted. Whether local authority buses are PTEs or municipal bus companies, local authorities will be asked to put their bus operations at arm's length and invite tenders for providing services on uneconomic routes. That is merely an extension of the principle of the direct labour organisations, which have been with us for three years.

I entirely accept the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo), who said that competition between municipal operators when they are at arm's length in a public limited company, the private sector and parts of the National Bus Company must be on all fours and must be fair. Our careful working out of the timetable necessary under the forthcoming Transport Bill will be designed to get the best possible fairness in the system.

My hon. Friend asked about quality control enforcement, and I again draw his attention to the White Paper. Extra resources will be provided to ensure that quality control is stiffened in relation to vehicle safety and the mechanical condition of vehicles and in relation to the behaviour of drivers on the road to ensure that they do not do silly, dangerous or selfish things. It will be possible to remove the licence of an operator who refuses to behave sensibly on the road. Fears about safety and conduct will be assuaged by what we intend to do, and I can develop those points in Committee.

Mr. Penhaligon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ridley: I am coming to the hon. Gentleman's point. He has intervened three times to ask questions, but I knew exactly what the questions were and would have answered them anyway. His questions are so obvious that they would have been answered whether or not he had been here.

In rural areas, tendering for uneconomic services will provide the same services for less money or more services for the same money. The trial area of Hereford and Worcester, which the hon. Lady got completely wrong — I advise her again to do her homework — demonstrated that that principle is true. With a roughly similar service provision, annual subsidy to the bus operators in the trial area fell by 38 per cent.; fares fell dramatically, in some cases by as much as 50 per cent.; and the standard of service was maintained. Therefore, we have the evidence of what would happen in rural areas, and the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) should note that. I have never claimed that the experience of Hereford and Worcester was applicable to municipal and metropolitan areas, but that is the evidence for rural areas. I invite hon. Members to visit Hereford and Worcester and to talk not only to the county council but to the people on the streets, who would tell them that if anyone removed their regime of bus services they would be furious.

Other advantages will come to the rural areas. Deregulation will also bring new opportunities to try new types of service, including shared taxis. Despite the disparaging remarks of the hon. Member for Crewe, more poor people and women are travelling by taxi, and they will be able to travel more cheaply if the taxis can be shared.

Mr. Hayward: Will my right hon. Friend lend one of the taxis to Labour Back-Bench Members, who would fit easily into one this evening? They are displaying their opposition to the Government's proposals by being represented by only three hon. Members.

Mr. Ridley: They would certainly qualify for an innovation grant, since their ideas are as stale and as old-fashioned as can be.

In the rural areas we shall have the benefit of competition to reduce subsidies, as happened in Hereford and Worcester. There will also be an innovation grant, and we can examine the results of shared taxis and minibuses. I also mention the £20 million transitional rural bus grant. All those factors, together with the continuing resources of county councils, in future through the GREA system rather than the transport supplementary grant system, will mean that the ability of rural areas to provide services will be enhanced. The hon. Lady did not get that point right, but she need do only a little homework to discover that that will be the case. We can forget this rubbish about decimating rural bus services, and should acknowledge the fact that the Government's proposals are designed to improve, and will succeed in improving, rural bus services.

The Government's policy is to

"encourage the competition which in some—though not all—industries promotes competition and holds down prices, provide the customer—again in some though not all industries—with the alternative choices which create consumer power; ensure that industrial power and commercial influence are diffused in a way which prevents the tyranny and inefficiency of either massive state ownership or the domination of unaccountable private monopolies".

[Mr. Ridley]

Those were the words of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), spoken on 16 October 1984——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Stranmillis College Belfast

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

10 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): This is the first occasion that I have used the opportunities afforded by the Adjournment debate to raise a matter affecting an individual—one of my constituents. I make no apology for doing so, because in the last resort all representations which hon. Members make on behalf of constituents to Ministers ultimately rest on the assumption of an opportunity on the Floor of the House to bring considerations to the attention of the House and of the Minister in a more formal manner.

In any case, I think it would be agreed that what is involved here is a difficult and important matter of administrative judgment. I would not have been so convinced that it deserved to be raised but for the judgment of someone well versed in the area concerned, for whose opinion I have a great respect, who described the administrative decision that I wish to challenge tonight as "the only case in which" he

"felt that justice had not been done in his 14 years of dealing with the Department."

I therefore hope that the Minister — although he has twice and personally reconsidered the background to this decision — will feel that before I sit down I have provided him with sufficient reason for reviewing it yet again. I am sure that he will do so with an open mind.

Stranmillis college, in the constituency represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), is unique and outstanding among all the colleges of education in the United Kingdom. It occupies a unique position in the educational life of Belfast and the whole Province of Ulster, and is not strictly comparable with any other institution going under the same description in any part of the United Kingdom. It is indeed this unique nature of Stranmillis college which is the background to the administrative problem which, I suggest, was wrongly resolved in 1975-76.

It was in those years that the recommendations of the Houghton committee were applied to salary scales for staff in colleges of education. In Great Britain, and consequently by parity in Northern Ireland, the recommendations of the Houghton report were applied by way of classifying departments of education into six grades, rising by size from grade I up to grade VI, which comprised departments counting at least 900 units.

I should perhaps explain that the term "unit" is very much a term of art. It is more than a simple counting of heads of students; it is a composite statistical convention designed to convey in comparable terms the volume of work which is done in a department of education. The problem with which the Minister and I have been grappling was the manner in which grade VI was applied to the headship of the department of education in Stranmillis college.

In the application of the Houghton committee's recommendations it was at all times recognised that the relevant local education authority should have discretion in the light of exceptional circumstances to modify upwards the scales set out. The exceptional circumstances where the scales were modified in grades lower than grade VI obviously did not include excessive size, because the

automatic consequence of excessive size in terms of units of a department in any of the lower grades—I to V—would be its reclassification to a higher grade.

Nevertheless, the same provision was expressly made in the terms applied on the mainland also to grade VI. The terms were:

"Where the local education authority consider that in the special circumstances of a particular case of a Head of Department Grade VI the maximum prescribed above is not adequate, the authority may, in agreement with the Secretary of State, extend the scale to such higher maximum as they deem appropriate."

The question that I am putting before the House concerns the use of that discretion to award a higher scale in the case of a grade VI department, being a department of over 900 units, namely, the education department in Stranmillis college.

The number of units on the same reckoning appropriate to the department at Stranmillis was 1,610. In other words, it was immensely in excess, in size and importance, of the minimum size for a department to be graded grade VI. The question is whether the discretion should not have been so exercised as to apply to Stranmillis a higher scale appropriate to a so much larger load than the minimum load for grade VI as is indicated by the figure that I have just given to the House.

The answer must clearly turn—I am at one with the Minister in believing this—on essential comparability between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. The Minister told me that his Department had considered whether it should break away from the principles applied in Great Britain and go it alone. I believe, and I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends will agree, that the Minister was right to stick to the principle of parity as far as it could be applied. My only quarrel with the Minister, and the point on which I make my submission to him, is that the manner in which the principle of parity with Great Britain was applied was, in the circumstances unreasonable.

I inquired of the Minister what was the evidence for Departments in Great Britain of sizes above 900 units and, to my great surprise, the Minister told me that the figure was "not readily available". Yet that is the crucial figure, because if it should turn out that on the mainland the size of departments in grade VI is commonly only a little above the number of minimum of 900, then the case, on sheer grounds of size, for a special scale being applied to Stranmillis with its 1,610 units, is irresistible.

However, there must evidently have been figures available, as I am told that the figure for the next largest department identified in grade VI after Stranmillis at the time when the comparison was made was no more than 909 units. So we are comparing a department with 1,610 units and 29½ staff with departments on the mainland of which at the relevant time the largest had 909 units and only 15½ staff.

Clearly, the general concession of a discretion on the part of education authorities—in this case the Minister's department — to make a special scale for special circumstances was amply fulfilled in the circumstances of Stranmillis.

Let me, to avoid any misunderstanding, assure the Minister that I am in no way basing my argument upon the particular qualities or attainments of the individual who, at the time concerned, was the head of the department. Those, by general consent, were outstanding. Nevertheless, it is not upon that basis that the argument that I am advancing is founded. It is founded upon the sheer unreasonableness, given a system in which departments are graded for purposes of salary at successive minimum and maximum sizes, of treating a department of 1,610 units on the same basis as departments of little more than 900 units, which are the norm in Great Britain with which the comparison is to be made.

My request to the Minister is that he should seriously address himself to a specific point. He should ascertain —I cannot believe that it is impossible to do so—the corresponding conditions obtaining on the mainland in the relevant years in departments of education graded in grade VI. If it turns out, as I believe it will, that the disparity between Stranmillis and either the norm or the maximum on the mainland was as gross and striking as I have suggested, then he must admit that an adjustment should have been made to the scale in the case of Stranmillis to take account of it.

I readily accept that in the other grades mere size of department was not regarded as adequate basis for exceptional treatment. That was only logical, however, since exceptional size was going to be dealt with anyhow by promotion into the next higher grade. It stands to reason that one could not create a top grade with a minimum and not a maximum size without taking into account major discrepancies of size in fixing the scale to be applied.

In readdressing his mind to that question and in looking specifically at the comparison on which I rest my argument — on which we in Northern Ireland are generally content to rest our case—with Great Britain at the relevant time, the Minister will not incur any risk of creating damaging and dangerous precedents. I know how precedent-ridden are advisers when a Minister faces an administrative decision of this kind. In this instance the pieces on the board have moved in an unrecognisable fashion since the relevant years and the only benefit would accrue to an individual in retirement who I believe, having addressed my mind to the matter and having sought the best advice available, has a justifiable sense that an administrative decision was taken to his disadvantage.

No precedent will be created, no repercussions will accrue in any other direction. I think I know the Minister well enough to believe that he will not be able to resist my request that specifically in the terms that I have put to him he should, even a third time, look again at this individual, difficult but, in its context, important case.

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Northern Ireland (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) for having raised this issue on the Floor of the House and for the way in which he has conducted correspondence and pursued these arguments in the immediate past. I think that we are agreed on most of the background facts, although I should like to put some of them on the record. We know that the debate concerns the grading in respect of a former head of department at Stranmillis college, a college of education for the training of teachers in Belfast. Indeed, it might be appropriate for me to pay tribute to that college and to its role in teacher training, particularly during recent very difficult years in Belfast.

However, at issue tonight is the level of salary that was paid to the right hon. Gentleman's constituent for the period from 1 April 1975 until his retirement on 31 August 1976, upon which his retirement pension was subsequently based. I should like to reiterate a point that I have made

[Mr. Nicholas Scott]

to the right hon. Gentleman in correspondence. The merits of this case have nothing whatever to do with the personal or professional qualities of his constituent, about which there has never been the slightest question.

The matter has been raised with my Department by the right hon. Gentleman's constituent and, as has been made clear, there has been correspondence between us. I am perfectly satisfied that the investigations that have over the years been conducted within the Department of Education in Northern Ireland have been thorough and that the conclusions reached have been supported by the terms of the so-called Burnham document and by the Northern Ireland salary regulations which apply in such circumstances.

My officials took great care to ensure that the treatment of the right hon. Gentleman's constituent was not prejudiced by the fact that Stranmillis was by far and away the largest of the three colleges of education in Northern Ireland and that there was, therefore, no means of making direct comparisons with other heads of departments of a comparable size within the Province. In a moment I shall outline the steps that were taken within the Department in that respect.

For the benefit of those hon. Members who do not represent Northern Ireland constituencies, I should make it clear that, although the education system in the Province is administered as a separate entity by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland, it has been Government policy, in so far as is possible, to maintain a broad equivalence of provision between the Province and the rest of the United Kingdom. This policy has applied to all phases of education and, for obvious reasons, has been closely observed in the determination of salaries paid to teachers and further education lecturers. Although there have always been separate salary negotiations for Northern Ireland, the outcome has always followed closely, and more often followed precisely, the settlement of salary negotiations in England and Wales.

For the record, perhaps I should explain that the framework within which salary negotiations take place was laid down by the Pelham committee — which subsequently became known as the Burnham committee — following the 1974 Houghton report, and this has remained substantially unaltered in principle over the past decade. This establishes a comprehensive and definitive method by which the entitlements of, in this instance, a college of education to different grades of staffing are established, including such things as the proportion of senior posts and the emoluments applicable to the post holders. The means of aiming at conclusions on these matters and the factors to be taken into account are clearly identified in the Burnham document. In addition, in Northern Ireland commensurate provision is made in the college of education salaries regulations.

I shall explain in slightly more detail than the right hon. Gentleman did how the gradings of a college and its academic departments are determined on the basis of point scores. The score is built up from three elements: the numbers of students on courses; the number of hours of work undertaken by students in the college in a normal week, and the number of weeks' attendance students are required to fulfil during the academic year. Having agreed the appropriate figures for those components with the local authority or, in the case of Northern Ireland, with the Department of Education, the subsequent computation and consequent grading can be determined from the tables set out in the Burnham document. For a head of department, grading is determined by the category within which the points score falls. At the bottom of the scale, as the right hon. Gentleman has said, a grade I head of department will require 76 points, whereas grade VI requires 901 points at the minimum. I emphasise that that is the minimum required for a grade VI appointment.

The bands approximately double with each step. For example, the difference between grade I and grade II is from 76 to 140 points. The difference between grade V and grade VI is from 601 points to 900 points. If one extrapolates that into the difference between grade VI and a possible grade VII, one would be talking about a dividing line on 1400 or 1500 points. I accept that the Stranmillis point score is in excess of that, although not greatly. In a sense, that is beside the point because there has never been any question of such an extrapolation. In Great Britain, the Department of Education and Science has resolutely declined to accept it.

The points score at Stranmillis was 1610. Immediately the Department of Education in Northern Ireland recognised that that was significantly in excess of the minimum points necessary to justify a grade VI head of department. The trouble is that there are no means by which to acknowledge that excess of points in a tangible way. That is the root of the difference between the right hon. Member for South Down and the Department.

I can assure the House that the Department endeavoured at the time to establish any means that might be appropriate to make this possible. Most contingencies are covered in the Burnham document and, in particular, there is a discretionary clause which provides, with the agreement of the Secretary of State for Education and Science, for salary enhancement in special circumstances.

The college orginally based its claim on that set of circumstances and the large size of the education department at Stranmillis. The Department of Education in Northern Ireland consulted the authoritative sources— the DES and the local authorities conditions of service advisory board, but unfortunately it was only too clear from the advice received that sheer size and volume of work did not constitute special circumstances for such enhancement.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does any comparable post exist in England and Wales for which so many units are not recognised?

Mr. Scott: We have been unable to establish that. We are talking about 10 years ago. Many of the comparable institutions involving teacher training and further education that one would have looked to 10 years ago for comparable figures have been merged or reduced in size as a result of the rundown in teacher training. It is not possible to establish from the authorities on this side of the water whether comparable sizes existed here at the time.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Can the Minister let me have a list of the authorities responsible for grade VI departments? I shall willingly correspond with them and ask them to turn up their records for the 1970s, since this is a material point.

Mr. Scott: That may be so, but the essential point is that, whatever excess there was over the minimum of 901,

the Department of Education and Science and the Burnham committee have resolutely set their faces against extrapolating the grades a step further—originally to grade VIII as suggested by Stranmillis or even to the grade VII, its fallback position. Sheer size and volume of work do not constitute the circumstances for such enhancement. It was understood that there were instances in comparable institutions in England and Wales where heads of large departments had point scores considerably in excess of 901. However, there had been no agreement to extend the Burnham gradings and the Burnham committee resolutely set its face against any such movement. In those circumstances it would not have been right for my Department to make a special exception in this case.

At a later stage in the protracted negotiations the college submitted a case for special circumstances apart from size, but the professional advice received by my Department was that the duties listed did not constitute anything out of the ordinary for a large education department. I take the point about drawing comparisons with institutions in Great Britain where there are point scores ranging above 901, but over and above the difficulty which I have mentioned of trying to identify precise analogues my Department considered that the overriding determinant was the interpretation by the Department of Education and Science of the Burnham provisions. The advice was that no matter how high the point score, size alone did not constitute special circumstances.

The only other possibility within the Burnham rules would have been to restructure the college with the education department established as a faculty, having itself a number of constituent departments, with the head of the department becoming, as it were, a dean of the faculty with an appropriate allowance. This possibility was examined in great depth and was regarded as neither practical nor desirable within the college's existing academic structures for the education department.

It is some while since my Department was so involved in the protracted negotiations in this case, which ran from 1976 to 1981. It is always difficult to appreciate a situation as it obtained some years past. However, from the more recent examination which I have conducted as a result of correspondence initiated by the right hon. Member for South Down, I am satisfied that my Department pursued every avenue possible and reached its conclusions rightly in the light of national interpretation of policy at the time.

I can well understand the right hon. Gentleman's concern for his constituent. I can assure him that if there had been any acceptable and valid way of facilitating his constituent my Department would have wished to adopt it. Alas, it was not possible to do that, and as we conducted our negotiations and discussions between the Department of Education and the Department of Education and Science we asked for their advice and asked them to seek the Burnham committee's guidance on what should be done. On each occasion the answer came back that there was no question of extending upwards. Indeed, the committee made it clear that it should not even be asked to offer an opinion on individual cases of this sort because grade VI was the top and only if, for example, a head of a department with an excessive point score was involved in some form of research elsewhere in the institution, or had taken on other responsibilities within the institution, would discretionary payment be considered.

I believe that the Department has done its best to try to find a way to provide the extra payments for the right hon. Gentleman's constituent. In seeking to remain on a par with the practice on this side of the water, it found that it could not in equity provide the extra payments.

I am sorry to have to give the right hon. Gentleman a disappointing reply. I have considered the matter with great care. I did so when he first wrote to me and I have done so following subsequent correspondence and in preparation for the debate. I am convinced that the Department behaved properly in coming to the conclusion that it did.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 8 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Business of the House

2.34 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House whether he will state the business for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. As the House is aware, the debate on the Address in reply to the Gracious Speech will be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 13 November. At the end on Tuesday, motion on the Local Government (Supplementary Grants for Transport Purposes Specified Descriptions) Order.

WEDNESDAY 14 NOVEMBER—Opposition Day (1st Allotted Day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion on schools and further education.

THURSDAY 15 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill.

FRIDAY 16 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the New Towns and Urban Development Bill and of the Mineral Workings Bill.

MONDAY 19 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Films Bill.

Mr. Kinnock: We shall today be tabling amendments to the Queen's Speech for debate on Monday and Tuesday. We shall be hotly contesting the motion on the transport order on Tuesday night because it will deprive substantial sections of the public of essential support for the bus services on which they depend.

May we have a firm assurance that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will come to the House on Monday to inform us of the contents of the Government's autumn statement? Will the Leader of the House further assure us that the debate on the Opposition's amendment to the Queen's Speech on Tuesday will not supersede the usual full day's debate on the statement and that the debate on the statement will take place before the end of the month?

Mr. Biffen: I have noted that there are to be amendments to the Queen's Speech on Monday and Tuesday and that the order that is postulated for Tuesday will be contested. Thus we shall start in that atmosphere of good-natured controversy which I imagine will characterise the weeks and months ahead.

I can confirm that the Chancellor's autumn statement will be made on Monday and that the debate on Tuesday will not supersede the debate that is customarily held on the statement. Perhaps the timing of that can be a matter for consideration through the usual channels.

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): I agree with the Leader of the Opposition and with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that it would not be appropriate to treat the debate on the Queen's Speech as a substitute for a debate on the Chancellor's autumn statement, which certainly deserves a full day. May I bring to my right hon. Friend's attention the unsatisfactory arrangement in previous years, when there has not been adequate time for the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee to take evidence on the subject from Treasury Ministers and others? Will he ensure that the timing allows for that so that the House may be fully informed before it debates the matter?

Mr. Biffen: I am a little distressed at the ready denigration of the significance of Tuesday's debate, because I shall be winding it up. I am aware that the House requires the normal conventions to be observed in those matters. I can make no promises to my right hon. Friend on the other point that he raises, but I shall take it into account.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Having announced that the first Opposition day is to be taken by the Labour party, has the Leader of the House yet formed a view as to which party will take the second Opposition day? Is he under a great deal of pressure from his hon. Friends to ensure that that day is available to the Labour party rather than risking placing it in the hands of the alliance?

Mr. Biffen: The answer to both parts of the question is no, Sir.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Following my similar question two weeks ago, has my right hon. Friend yet allocated a day for the House to debate the report of the Committee of Public Accounts on the scandal of the De Lorean company and the Government's response to it?

Mr. Biffen: No. I have nothing further to add to the answer that I then gave to my hon. Friend, but I shall certainly look at the matter again.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Does the Leader of the House recall that, just before the general election, we had to debate and pass the Boundary Commission's reports? Much concern was then expressed not about the independence of the Boundary Commission but about some of the rather foolish things that it had done. There was criticism of the rules and of the rather silly names that have been given to many constituencies. The Minister of State, Home Office, now the Solicitor-General, gave a handsome reply saying that he thought that there ought to be an inquiry. I have inquired once or twice since at business questions and have been told that something is happening. Will something happen before the next Boundary Commission starts its work?

Mr. Biffen: The right hon. Gentleman was kind enough to give me notice of his question. I agree at once that the so-called reforms of constituency names are a downright offence to many hon. Members. I shall, of course, take up the point that the right hon. Gentleman has raised.

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): When will the House have an opportunity to debate the agreement between this country and the People's Republic of China in respect of Hong Kong? I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that many hon. Members have a close interest in that matter, and it would be helpful to have preliminary advice.

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that my hon. Friend will appreciate that that topic falls well within the order for tomorrow's debate, which relates substantially to foreign affairs. However, I realise that my hon. Friend has an interest in the matter and that it should be debated in its own right.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Although I appreciate that tomorrow's debate will concentrate mainly on foreign affairs, will the right hon. Gentleman give a firm commitment that, if the United States intervenes in Nicaragua next week in pursuance of hostile action against a Government who have recently been re-elected, the Foreign Secretary will make a statement to the House?

Mr. Biffen: I shall of course draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to the anxiety that the hon. Gentleman has expressed.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the distress felt in all parts of the House over the 50 per cent. reduction in the amount of time allocated for Church questions this Session? Does he agree that, given the recent utterances by one or two bishops, the guidance of our own personal bishop in this House will be very much missed?

Mr. Biffen: The purpose of my hon. Friend's questions goes wider than the persecution of bishops. However, I realise that the change has caused some anxiety, and I shall certainly take account of what has been said.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Will the right hon. Gentleman urgently draw to the attention of the Secretary of State for Social Services the importance of early-day motion 40 and at the same time ask him to give the House an early and helpful response?

[That this House is deeply concerned that, notwithstanding strict economy measures, the South Manchester Health Authority has insufficient money to maintain its hospital services and is proposing to close up to eight wards at Withington and Wythenshawe Hospitals; notes that the proposals affect wards for children, maternity, geriatric patients, chest medicine and general surgery; congratulates the South Manchester Community Health Council on its campaign to prevent the closures; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government urgently to ensure that adequate funds are now made available for the protection of patient care in South Manchester.]

Mr. Biffen: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State sits at my left elbow and will have heard the right hon. Gentleman's question.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the other place has already discussed the highly controversial Warnock report, with all its medical, social and legal difficulties. Does he not agree that a matter of such supreme importance to the people of this country should be discussed by the elected Members of Parliament? Can he give us some intimation — if not next week, then fairly soon — that such an opportunity will be given?

Mr. Biffen: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that a debate can be arranged shortly.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Is the Leader of the House aware of the widespread public concern about the crisis of management within the NCB and the Government's unwillingness to seek an honourable and acceptable settlement of the miners' dispute? When will the Prime Minister come to the House to tell hon. Members and the country what the Government are doing to secure a settlement of the dispute?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman has raised general points that could be included in Tuesday's debate, which will range widely across the economic issues that are at the centre of our present political disputes. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have a chance then to make his points.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week to discuss a matter relating to the tabling of early-day motions? On Tuesday I queued for about an hour and a half waiting for the Table Office to open. I was fourth in the queue. I was therefore surprised to see in yesterday's Order Paper that my motion appeared as No. 36 and that there were no fewer than 14 motions standing in the name of the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), six in the name of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), one in the name of the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) and others, none of whom do I recollect seeing in the queue. I appreciate that they may well have asked one of their colleagues to table a motion for them, but to do it on that scale and to table so many motions reflecting their respective party policies may be considered by hon. Members to be a breach of the system. Perhaps hon. Members could have time to debate this subject.

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend has had an experience which is characteristic of the lack of natural justice in politics. I cannot say why that seeming preference should have been given to the Leader of the Opposition. I think that the matter comes within the ambit of the Table Office, which is within your responsibility, Mr. Speaker, not within mine. I can offer no prospect of an early debate, but I imagine that a letter to the Procedure Committee would not come amiss.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Yet again this Session Welsh questions will come up every three weeks while Scottish questions will come up every four weeks. I appreciate that Welsh Question Time does not last for the full hour, but over a period Welsh Members representing only 36 constituencies will have a greater opportunity to question Welsh Office Ministers than Scottish Members representing 72 constituencies will have to question Scottish Office Ministers. Does the Leader of the House propose to do anything to correct the anomaly?

Mr. Biffen: These matters were discussed through the usual channels, although I know that that will not be entirely reassuring to the hon. Gentleman. On the whole, the Scots do not have an inequitable deal in the amount of time that they have in the House. If the number of occasions that Minister answer questions is adjusted to the amount of time allotted, the situation is not that intolerable.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm that the House will have time to consider, and to make known to the Government its views on, the report issued recently by the Select Committee on the Environment on what is colloquially known as acid rain? Will that debate be sooner rather than later in view of the serious findings of that Committee?

Mr. Biffen: It would be to the advantage of the House if the Department of the Environment's comments on the report were available before the debate so that we might have time to consider it. With that proviso, I agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): In view of the disturbing allegation by the Home Office pathologist, Dr. Donald Wayte, that the majority of babies who suffer cot deaths are probably smothered by their parents, may we have an early statement to allay understandable public concern?

Mr. Biffen: That is a serious matter which I shall draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Does my right hon. Friend think it likely, now that the business for next week has been announced and does not seem to be too onerous, that the Leader of the Opposition will be able to attend Mr. Scargill's rallies?

Mr. Biffen: I have been educated in a very hard school over a period of years, if not months, to ignore totally that kind of negative question.

Mr. Kinnock: May I suggest that, if the diary of the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) is clear, perhaps he would like to go to one or two of the rallies?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that we agree with the view expressed by the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) that the timing of the debate on the autumn statement should be such as to allow the House to be fully informed? Does he agree that there should not be undue delay in that consideration? We value the procedure of consideration by the Select Committee because it enhances our debates, but is the right hon. Gentleman aware that we should be hostile to the idea that such procedure should impede consideration of the statement by the House at a time when it is fresh in everyone's memory and fresh in the public's mind?

Mr. Biffen: The right hon. Gentleman mentions a range of considerations which make the usual channels so invaluable. On the right hon. Gentleman's first point, I might be available to make my diary clear if I could have his express authority to go to one of the meetings and explain exactly what he meant by his references to Gallipoli.

BILLS PRESENTED

National Heritage (Scotland)

Mr. Secretary Younger, supported by the Solicitor-General for Scotland, Mr. Allan Stewart, Mr. John MacKay and Mr. John Moore, presented a Bill to transfer responsibility for the Royal Scottish Museum and the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland to a new Board of Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland, to establish a Board of Trustees of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, to make provision as to the status, functions and powers of the new Boards, and as to the property to be held by them, to make further provision as to the Boards of Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland and the National Library of Scotland, to confer on the Secretary of State power to make grants for cultural and scientific purposes, to amend the Public Records (Scotland) Act 1937 and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 5].

Friendly Societies

Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by Mr. Peter Rees, Mr. John Moore, Mr. Barney Hayhoe, Mr. Ian Stewart, Mr. Norman Lamont and Mr. Alexander Fletcher, presented a Bill to validate certain contracts of insurance entered into by registered friendly societies before 1st June 1984 and to modify, with both retrospective and prospective effect, provisions relating to the financial limits in section 64 of the Friendly Societies Act 1974 and section 332 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 7].

Films

Mr. Secretary Tebbit, supported by Mr. Secretary Brittan, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Kenneth Baker and Mr. Norman Lamont, presented a Bill to repeal the Films Acts 1960 to 1980; to make further provision with respect to the financing of films; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 6].

Hon. Member for Tiverton (Comments)

2.49 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When the comments yesterday of the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) were drawn to my attention, I notified him that I would raise the matter today. I do not know whether he received my message. On the hon. Gentleman's tortuous route, he claimed that the Select Committee on Procedure had

"arranged its day of sitting to suit the convenience of the leader of the Liberal party who scarcely ever bothered to turn up".—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 113.]

[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] My right hon. Friend is, perhaps, discussing the matter with the hon. Member for Tiverton, who also is not present. However, I must confess that my right hon. Friend is visiting the right hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Wakeham), the Government Chief Whip, in hospital in Brighton.

As my right hon. Friend was not a member of the Committee, he would not have been able to take part in its meetings had he turned up, and the Committee did not arrange its meetings to suit my right hon. Friend's convenience. The hon. Member for Tiverton said that I had requested a meeting on a particular afternoon but had not turned up. On checking the record, I discovered that I had attended eight of the 10 Committee meetings—exactly the same number as those attended by the hon. Member for Tiverton.

In referring to the record of which hon. Members attended which meetings, the hon. Gentleman also referred to those parts of the Committee's proceedings that had not been reported to the House. Conversely, and for our assistance if this matter is raised again, as no doubt it will be, is it not true that the aspect of the Committee's proceedings referred to yesterday—the report made by the Committee, in the same document as its report on short speeches, of the meeting that took place on Tuesday 17 July 1984—was reported to the House?

The report contains the words

"Motion made and Question proposed, That the Committee do inquire into Public Bill Procedure."

It then reports that an amendment was proposed to the Question, to add the words

"and simultaneously into Opposition Time."

The Division on that Question was recorded, with my vote cast in favour and six votes, including that of the hon. Member for Tiverton, cast against.

The hon. Member for Tiverton was not only inaccurate and grossly misleading in what he said but out of order. However, it was in order to refer to that part of the report of the Committee that stated that its decision at this stage was not to inquire into the subject of Opposition time.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman makes his point. I said yesterday that we should not refer in the Chamber to reports of Select Committees that had not been put before the House. In this case, it was put before the House.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) will read in *Hansard* what the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has said.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[THIRD DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [6 November]

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament—*[Sir Paul Bryan.]*

Question again proposed.

Health, Social Security and Education

2.53 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): I very much welcome the opportunity of this debate. It gives me an opportunity to deal with the issues of health and social security and the reform of pensions that are central to this Government's concerns. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science will deal with issues in his area of concern.

I am bound to say that I am reminded of the debate on the Health Service we had 12 months ago. That debate took place in the context of the manpower policy introduced a short time previously—the first time any Government had asked for a manpower policy from health authorities, over 70 per cent. of whose spending is taken up by staff costs.

During that debate the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) talked of

"the intensification of the attack on the NHS by the Government"

and of

"an unmitigated crime against the British people".—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1983; Vol. 47, c. 441-49.]

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) spoke of decisions being

"Kafka-like in their nightmare quality."—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1983; Vol. 47, c. 504.]

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) in a speech in London a few days later, said:

"The gloves are off, the pace of attack is accelerating for the kill".

Yet what have been the results over the past 12 months? Over the past 12 months there have been 300,000 more inpatients treated in English hospitals. There have been 100,000 more day cases treated in English hospitals and there have been 850,000 more outpatient attendances at English hospitals. What is the significance of these figures? Far from showing that there has been a deterioration in health care, they show that the Health Service is providing more care, more services and more help for patients than at any stage since the inception of the NHS. They show also that, compared with 1978, the last year in office of the Labour Government, our hospitals provided treatment for 3½ million more cases. There were 650,000 more inpatient cases, 2½ million more outpatient attendances and ¼ million more day cases.

The reason for quoting these figures is simple. We can argue over the number of staff employed—in fact, we

are employing 12 per cent. more doctors and 13 per cent. more nurses than when we came to office. We can argue over the amount of money spent—in fact, expenditure has increased by 17 per cent. against inflation since 1978-79. However, those are not the crucial tests.

One of the crucial tests is not how much is spent but the results that are obtained from the resources. That is the test in any service, any industry and any business. The message of the figures is unmistakable. If we compare the rate of improvement in patient services over the five years of the Labour Government, from 1974 to 1978, with the five years of Conservative Government that followed, we find that between 1973 and 1978 the number of inpatient cases treated per year rose by 4½ per cent. whereas over the past five years it has risen by over 12 per cent.—almost three times as fast. The increase in inpatient cases treated last year was considerably more than was achieved under the five years of the Labour Government.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): How does the 17 per cent. that the right hon. Gentleman claims compare with the 7 per cent. that is declared in the report published only last week by his Department? I can refer the right hon. Gentleman to the relevant page if he wishes.

Mr. Fowler: I am well aware of that, because I wrote the report myself. The increase in economic cost terms was 17 per cent. We made it clear that expenditure has increased by 17 per cent. against the retail price index. The hon. Gentleman is referring to the volume estimate of 7 per cent. The two percentages are not incompatible with each other, but I ask him to take note of the figures that I have drawn to the attention of the House. What matters in the end—I suggest that it matters to him as much as to me, given his long connection with the NHS—is what we are doing with the resources and how we are putting them to use.

Over the past four or five years the Health Service has been putting resources to extremely good use. The hon. Gentleman may agree with me that the figures are, first and foremost, a tribute to the staff of the NHS at whatever level and whatever occupation. The figures do not mean that all the problems of health care have been magically solved overnight. I would never claim that and one of my criticisms of Opposition Front Bench spokesmen is that they tend to go in for that sort of promise. Like every health service in Europe, we are facing increasing demands from the rising number of elderly and from medical advance itself.

Mr. George Park (Coventry, North-East): The Secretary of State has given the statistics for one side of the picture, but I ask him to give the House the statistics for the other side by giving details of the waiting lists.

Mr. Fowler: The waiting lists are set out in the annual report. When the Conservative Government took office they had an inherited waiting list of about 750,000. That list was reduced by about 100,000 until the health dispute of 1982. One of the results of that dispute was that the list lengthened again. I am glad to say that it is now reducing. The lesson and the logic of that is that it was the industrial action, backed by the Labour Opposition which sent up the waiting list. If the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Park) feels so strongly about the waiting lists, I wish that some Opposition Members had had the courage to condemn the industrial action that had that inevitable result.

Mr. Pavitt *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: I shall not give way. Compared with the position that has been described, the figures show a picture of developing care. Compared with five years ago, the rate of perinatal mortality is down by nearly a third. There has been a rise of more than 50 per cent. in the number of new renal patients accepted for treatment. We have more than doubled the numbers of coronary artery bypass grants. Those are the health care figures. They show the Government's real commitment to an expanding and improving Health Service. They are the figures that give the lie to the Opposition Front Bench charges.

I am bound to say that we are not prepared to take lectures on patient care from the Opposition Front Bench. It is not simply that they do not have a monopoly on social concern; it is that their social record when in office simply does not stand up. Never can that which achieved so little have claimed so much. It was the Labour party when in Government that made the biggest cuts in the capital building programme in the history of the Health Service. It was the party that backed industrial action in 1982 and the party which unleashed record inflation of 110 per cent. over five years, which had devastating effects on the elderly, the poor and the sick and affected virtually every social programme.

The fact is that the Labour party's claims to protect the Health Service are as bogus as its charges that we have damaged it. The fact is that there is a range of challenges on health care that we must face with realism. There are, for example, the challenges of replacing old and outdated hospitals, of providing for the growing needs of our aging population, of making new forms of treatment available to patients throughout the Health Service, of providing care for the mentally ill and the mentally handicapped, of treating patients and the public as individuals, and of being more sensitive to their human needs and problems.

If we are to face those and the other challenges successfully, we need to ensure the best possible value for the money that we spend—the best possible use of resources. Lord Ennals, who was Secretary of State for Social Services, in his report on the Health Service for 1976 said:

> "We must renew our efforts to get, and to give, full value for money . . . People have the right to be assured that the money they pay in taxes and contributions is used to the best advantage."

I agree with the noble Lord, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Oldham, West does also, although I am bound to say that he has never brought himself to say just that.

This is not the occasion to underline every one of the measures that we have taken to achieve better value for money in the Health Service, but let me take two. The Rayner scrutinies have revealed major opportunities for savings. The study of transport showed potential for savings of at least £15 million a year. Our survey of residential accommodation found that the Health Service owned property worth more than £1 billion—a fifth of which stood empty at any one stage. The potential to release resources for patient care should be clear. We are seeking also to dispose of surplus land in NHS ownership. Last year, we sold land worth more than £30 million. New opportunities have now been opened up. This August we implemented legislation to permit health authorities to maximise the value of land by obtaining planning permission before a sale. Taken together, the resources

[Mr. Fowler]

locked up in surplus residential accommodation and land can surely be released and ploughed back into developments for patients.

The other example of the measures that we have taken to achieve better value for money is in the process of competitive tendering, which is already producing major savings inside the Health Service. The latest figures that I have show that, so far, 34 Health Service contracts let to private contractors will be producing total savings of more than £18 million during the next three years. Three individual hospitals have each saved more than £500,000 on cleaning contracts—in one case, a reduction of two thirds on previous costs. One health authority will save £1·4 million a year.

That is not all. There is another advantage from the programme of competitive tendering that we are following. As a result of the competition, there have been considerable reductions in the cost of contracts that have stayed in-house—savings of more than £100,000 a year in the case of one domestic contract and £100,000 a year in the case of a laundry contract. All that money is now available for patient care, and all that money would be lost to patients if Labour could ever carry out its conference resolution to end all competition and to ban private contractors.

Value for money is, therefore, a central objective—value for the taxpayer and, above all, for the patient.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): My right hon. Friend referred to the privatisation of cleaning services. We also know that some privatisation has taken place in catering. Is he aware that south Derbyshire health authority has privatised its energy and boiler services for its central laundry in Derby at a saving of more than £120,000 a year? What is he doing to draw to the attention of health authorities the savings that can be achieved by more efficient privatised energy services?

Mr. Fowler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that example. I also believe that Wakefield has done something further in that area. We shall clearly do our utmost to stress the benefits to the Health Service that flow from these policies. My central point is that the savings made can then be ploughed back into the Health Service and into patient care. That is what the policy is all about, and that is the policy that Labour Members are determined to try to defeat.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): The right hon. Gentleman talked about ploughing money back into patient care. Will he also reflect about the other side of the equation—those in the ancillary services who are at present contributing towards patient care? Will he comment on the view expressed by the Hospital Caterers Association, that the abolition of the fair wages resolution has, on average, led to a 20 per cent. reduction in the conditions of service for those in the ancillary sector?

Mr. Fowler: I do not accept that. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern for those working in the ancillary services, but it would be quite absurd for the Government to try to lay down from the centre all the terms and conditions of every outside contractor seeking a contract inside the Health Service. That would be an absurd position for the Government to get in.

The concept of value for money applies to all areas of the Health Service. As I said at Brighton four weeks ago, I do not exempt the drugs bill from that process. At present there are two proper causes of concern. First, there is the cost to the NHS of the drugs bill, which now totals nearly £1,400 million a year, compared with about £250 million 10 years ago. Secondly, there is concern over the fact that the public are demanding more drugs each year, the result being that doctors are now issuing 100 million more prescriptions each year than 25 years ago. Those prescriptions cover more than 17,000 different products, double the range used 25 years previously.

It is, of course, true that many of the increases are fully justified and reflect the enormous medical and pharmaceutical advances made in the last quarter of a century. But that is not true of all drugs that are now being prescribed under the NHS.

The clearest example is the wide range of branded medicines prescribed for minor conditions such as coughs and colds. In most cases those conditions will remedy themselves without medical intervention, and the medicines are prescribed for relieving the symptoms. By any standards they are the less important drugs. In fact, most can be bought over the counter from the local chemist without the need to consult a doctor or to obtain a prescription. Many people already buy them in that way. Nevertheless, these branded medicines — tonics, cold and cough remedies, indigestion and headache tablets and low dose vitamin pills—are currently costing the Health Service £120 million a year.

A second group are the tranquillisers and sedatives. Some of the branded sleeping pills come into that category. The use of those drugs has expanded dramatically in recent years—many doctors would say too far. Many different brand name products have been introduced which have essentially similar properties, and the cost to the NHS is now £40 million a year.

We have already made it clear that we do not intend to move over to a policy of indiscriminate generic substitution, which would both limit the freedom of the medical profession and have a serious effect on the research-based pharmaceutical industry in Britain. I see no reason, however, why in the two groups that I have set out the NHS should not limit itself to providing only the cheaper generic alternatives which are available. In other words, the patient can still obtain those kinds of medicines on prescription from his doctor under the Health Service, but they will be the cheaper generic alternatives. If the patient still wishes to go for a particular brand name, he will have the alternative of buying it over the counter from his local chemist or else asking his doctor to prescribe it privately. This is the kind of system that applies in many other countries already.

Clearly, I shall need to consult the professions and the industry to ensure that we do not accidentally exclude from NHS use a drug that is essential to the treatment of a particular condition. But I thought it right to tell the House in advance of the outline of those proposals. I shall be issuing a consultation letter later today, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health will be taking the consultation process forward. He will also be opening discussions with the pharmaceutical industry on the implications of the report of the review board on Government contracts for the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme. Again, our aim will be to contain the costs falling on the NHS.

Mrs. Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Can my right hon. Friend tell us whether any advance has been achieved in dealing with the problem that arises from the fact that many doctors issue repeat prescriptions of drugs such as valium, often continuing to do so for one, two and even three years? That problem, as I am sure my hon. Friend will accept, has worried many people.

Is it not the case that care has to be taken in the use of generic alternatives? A label or brand name gives some protection to the person who is taking the drug.

Mr. Fowler: I agree with what my hon. Friend said about repeat prescriptions, and I think that many doctors would also agree with her. Clearly, however, there are issues of professional freedom in that regard. We make advice available to doctors and we shall continue to do so.

With regard to reliability, I have no doubt whatever that, in the case of the drugs concerned—some of which one would describe as home remedies — the generic alternatives present no difficulties.

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): I welcome the partial step that the Secretary of State has mentioned. I think that it will assist in dealing with the question of generic alternatives. He particularly mentioned the effect of generic substitution on research in the pharmaceutical industry. Has he investigated with the pharmaceutical companies the possibility of extending the patent life of products to, say, 30 years? I understand that the industry would be prepared to negotiate in that respect. It would enable us to move towards a system of generic substitution without harming research.

Mr. Fowler: We are talking to the industry about that matter. It is a point that is uppermost in the minds of those in the industry.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) has also put his finger on the real concern about the pharmaceutical industry. None of us wants to damage the research-based British pharmaceutical industry, both because of the contribution that it makes to research and because of the employment consequences and the industry's contribution to the balance of payments. I have those issues very much in mind, and no one who reads what I have said could conclude that the drugs in question will damage anyone's research-based industry. They are not the most important drugs or the life-saving ones. I hope that both sides of the House will accept that this is a sensible step forward.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Bearing in mind that the Secretary of State has said that expenditure on drugs in the current year will amount to some £1,400 million, and as he always tells us that the Health Service budget amounts to some £17 billion a year, how much will be saved each year by the proposed change?

Mr. Fowler: It is difficult to give the hon. Gentleman an exact figure before the negotiations and discussions are held, but I believe that there may be a saving of the order of £100 million. Savings of that size are extremely valuable in an area where costs have risen considerably over the past few years.

We have already introduced new arrangements to ensure that parallel-imported drugs meet proper safety standards. I shall shortly announce further action to make sure that the Health Service does not lose out when exceptionally large discounts are offered to pharmacies by the wholesalers from whom they buy their drugs. That would be a further step towards achieving better value for money in the NHS drugs bill.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many people both inside and outside the medical profession are concerned about the treating of doctors by drug firms to encourage the prescribing of brand names.

Mr. Fowler: I understand that my hon. Friend is referring to hospitality offered by drug firms. We have given clear guidance to the medical profession about what is expected and required in this area. If there are any questions of abuse, I shall gladly look into them.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fowler: The Queen's Speech rightly underlined the importance of employment policies. The House will consider that question specifically on Monday, but it would be wrong to ring-fence consideration of the topic. For example, it is clear that policies on both pensions and social security can be central. In the case of pensions, it must be an aim of policy to remove artificial barriers that hinder people from moving jobs. We should extend freedom of choice, not only to enable people to fulfil their ambitions for themselves and their families but to encourage the generation of new wealth and new jobs. It is against that background that we shall present legislative proposals which, taken together, will represent the first major reform of occupational pension schemes for a decade. They will advance and develop the freedoms and rights of over 11 million people who are now members of occupational schemes, and remove injustices which still inhibit mobility and flexibility in the labour market.

There will be three main strands in the proposals. First, we shall be implementing reforms to protect the pension rights of people who leave an occupational pension scheme before pension age—the so-called early leavers. For far too long they have been treated by some — although not all—schemes as second-class citizens, with their residual pension rights frozen and depreciating in real terms. This is unfair to them and ultimately bad for the economy. The Bill that I shall shortly introduce will mean that in future employees who change jobs will have their pensions protected against inflation.

We shall require schemes to revalue preserved pension rights for those leaving schemes in line with the rise in prices, up to 5 per cent. a year. This solution represents the right balance between giving proper protection to members of occupational pension schemes, removing restrictions on job mobility and maintaining the essential role and interests of the schemes themselves.

Secondly, we have been consulting about our proposal to give people leaving an occupational pension scheme the right to a transfer value. This means that an employee who leaves an employer will be able to take with him the fair value of his pension rights. The transfer value could be used to obtain benefit rights in a new employer's scheme, or to buy the annuity of his own choice, or to invest in a personal pension. The proposal has been generally welcomed and I can now tell the House that we shall be implementing it in the Bill. It will help to make sure that all early leavers get a fair deal and more choice.

Thirdly, we shall be taking new steps to ensure that all members of pension schemes have more information about

[Mr. Fowler]

those schemes. For many people, their occupational pension is the biggest asset they have — worth more even than their home. The Bill will give a right of access to a wide range of information about schemes and a full account of their entitlement.

I believe that these proposals will be widely supported. Certainly the response to our consultative documents confirmed that these reforms would be especially welcomed by individual scheme members. For too long people who change jobs have paid a pensions penalty. These are the proposals on which we are taking action now but, as the House will know, we have published proposals for a major new pension option—the personal pension. The proposals have aroused unprecedented interest. More than 32,000 copies of the consultative document have been distributed. The consultation does not finish until the end of this month and that is set out in the document. Although I understand the enthusiasm of some for immediate action, we must allow time to consider the comments that we have received. It is clear that people want to be free to choose their own pension arrangements. I assure the House that we intend to give them that freedom.

The occupational pensions measures that I have described concern only part of social security provision. They are important measures in their own right and are designed to improve the pension structure but we want to achieve much more than that. However, our examination goes much further than pensions. The approach that the Government adopted is to look rationally and carefully at virtually the whole of the social security system to see how it should be developed to serve the needs we face in the last years of the 20th century because the situation we face now and the needs we shall face in the future are very different. The social security budget is now more than £37 billion a year — some 30 per cent. of all public spending. That is a sixty-fold increase in cash spending since the inception of the welfare state and a doubling of the proportion of the GDP devoted to social security. Part of that growth has been due to increases in demand. There are, for example, 16·5 per cent. more people getting retirement pension than 10 years ago. Most of the increase, however has been accounted for by increases in the real value of benefits and the range of circumstances in which benefits are payable.

After this month's uprating, national insurance retirement pensions will have risen by nearly 84 per cent. since November 1978. That is more than enough to protect them against the likely rise in prices—76 or 77 per cent. — over the same period. From this month, supplementary pensioners aged over 65 will receive additional help with heating costs, and there will be extra help for those over 85. We have increased the real value of mobility allowance and made it tax-free. The Government therefore cannot be accused of making cuts and of dismantling the welfare state.

Mr. Gordon Brown *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: However, there is one cause for special concern which has been caused by the protracted strike of a small minority of staff at the DHSS central office at Newcastle—fewer than 400 out of about 10,500. The dispute centres around management efforts to make full and economical use of the new generation of computer equipment now in use by three-shift working in areas where it is needed, such as the retirement pensions computer, and by ending unnecessary shifts where they are no longer justified, such as in laser printing. There have been protracted negotiations, and an offer from management under which no shiftworker need lose any take-home pay. Two of the three unions involved—the Society of Civil and Public Servants and the Civil Service Union — have voted to accept the management proposals, and the national officials of the third union, the Civil and Public Servants Association, have also recommended acceptance. But members of the CPSA voted last week to continue their action. In effect, they are saying that the present shift arrangements must be preserved in perpetuity, without reference to any changes in the actual requirements of the job of paying benefits to claimants.

Let me make two things clear about the dispute. First, and foremost, I deplore attempts to hit pensioners and families with children in pursuit of an industrial dispute. That is precisely what has happened. Secondly, despite the disruption, I can reassure hon. Members that the benefit uprating will go ahead and that the Christmas bonus will be paid.

I urge those who are still taking action to reconsider swiftly their position and accept what is by any sensible criterion a fair and reasonable offer. Failing that, we shall have to consider what further steps are needed to restore the service that pensioners and the public are entitled to expect.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Will the Secretary of State explain what he means by a fair system? In my constituency workers who are on strike have been offered a pay cut of between £10 and £14 a week. Does the Secretary of State expect workers to accept pay cuts because they are in the Government's interest? That would be ridiculous. The workers want to return to work and to pay the benefits as quickly as possible, but they want a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

Mr. Fowler: We have bent over backwards to do everything we can to preserve the interests of those who are working at Newcastle now. The hon. Gentleman's argument seems curious, considering that two of the three unions affected by the dispute have agreed to accept the offer and that the national leadership of the third has also recommended acceptance of the offer. To the objective outsider that shows that the case is not exactly as the hon. Gentleman seeks to present it, and that the Government have done everything in their power to make a reasonable offer. I hope that those who are on strike now will reconsider the offer urgently.

If there is one point on which the public are agreed it is that the social security system has by any standards become complex to administer and difficult to understand. That is to the disadvantage of claimants and staff alike. It is also worth underlining that it is very different from the system that Beveridge intended. He intended a fund which built up. However, we have not a funded scheme but a pay-as-you-go system in which today's contributions pay for today's benefits. Similarly, he did not perceive the growth in non-contributory benefits for families, the disabled and others, which has taken place, nor the role of supplementary benefit. The social security system of 1984 is not that proposed by William Beveridge, and the opponents of change should not seek to wrap themselves in Beveridge's mantle.

In the review which is now under way we have gone out of our way to an unprecedented extent to find out what people think about the issues facing us. We have invited individuals and organisations to submit evidence, we have held public sessions to discuss some of that evidence, and we have brought in people from outside Government to help us to assess the evidence. The response has been remarkable: more than 4,500 pieces of written evidence have been received and we have held 19 public sessions in the United Kingdom.

The task on which the Government are now engaged is to determine what should be done to improve the system, and in approaching that task we have several important considerations in mind. First, we must ensure that the resources provided are used to best effect. Secondly, we must take into account the issues that will confront us in the future. We know that although the real cost of pensions may not increase greatly before the end of the century, it will double after then. Moreover, that will happen at a time when the balance between the working and the retired population is worsening.

Thirdly, we must make the systems that we operate less complex for claimants and staff. The history of the development of social security since 1948 has been one of ad hoc change and additions. It has left us in a position where the civil servant attempting to determine the entitlement to supplementary benefit must refer to a guidance manual that contains 16,000 paragraphs of instructions. That cannot make sense.

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Minister boasts of an open review of the social security system, but will he also be open and frank with the House about what the social security review committees are doing? Will he confirm that, despite his promises to the House last July, and the promises of the Prime Minister, the committee that he chairs has been considering and costing detailed proposals to means-test child benefits, and considering proposals to remove the rights of teenagers to supplementary benefit? Will he confirm that the committee which is chaired by the Minister of State is considering removing the rights of pensioners to heating additions and to single payments? Will he admit that the welfare state is more in danger now than it has been at any time since Beveridge?

Mr. Fowler: I was probably right not to give way to the hon. Gentleman earlier. The Government are reviewing the entire social security system. The hon. Gentleman has just repeated a story that appeared in *The Observer* last Sunday, and I congratulate him on his memory of the details. We are considering all the options in child benefit and in supplementary benefit. He did not mention it, but we are also considering all the options in retirement pensions. That is what a review is about. There is no point in my carrying out such reviews if I am not prepared to consider all the options that are put to me. The Government are carrying out a review that should have been conducted years ago, but we are doing it only now, 40 years after Beveridge. It is absurd for the hon. Gentleman to believe that he can try to tie my hands as to what I should consider.

The review on housing benefit excepted, these are not separate reviews adopting different working methods and principles. We have embarked upon a review of almost the entire social security system. It is being carried out openly and without delay. It is being conducted in consultation with not only the public and expert outside bodies, but with all relevant Government Departments. The Government are considering and will consider their proposals in conjunction with tax; that has never been at issue, and it would be absurd to do otherwise. The proposals, which I hope to make in the early part of the new year, will be the Government's proposals and will take into account all our objectives.

We cannot and should not consider social security in isolation. Indeed, my Department is accompanying the review with examinations of the family practitioner service and the personal social services.

The Government's record on health and social security is one of consistent and realistic commitment. We understand that the welfare state cannot survive without the underpinning of a sound economic policy—a point which Labour Members have never understood, either in Government or in Opposition. We also understand that the purposes for which the welfare state was created have still to be met. That is why we have identified a clear strategy for improving the management of the Health Service, so that it can provide the services we will need during the latter part of this century. That strategy is now showing results. The record levels of finance being made available to the Health Service are being used to provide services to still greater numbers of patients. In the coming months our examination of the social security system — the most fundamental in the past 40 years—will enable us to put forward a strategy there to ensure that our duty to help those in need can be met consistent with our responsibility to contain the burden on the taxpayer and national insurance contributor.

The Government are determined that economic and industrial recovery must also benefit the elderly, the poor, and the sick. That is the challenge, and that is the challenge that we will meet.

3.35 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Eighteen months ago, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer revealed his fixation about cutting public expenditure by declaring in one of his first television interviews that his prime targets were health, social security and education. The experience of the past 18 months and the sheer lack of concern in the Queen's Speech for the steady and remorseless deterioration of our once great Health Service and welfare state are abundant and tragic testimony to the ruthlessness with which the Government's anti-NHS and anti-welfare state dogmas have been and are being pursued.

The deterioration in the Health Service is readily covered up, as it was today, by the Secretary of State's quotation of highly selective and misleading criteria on which to judge his NHS record.

Mr. Fowler: What about the number of patients treated?

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State should wait for what I am about to say in answer to that point.

On the other hand, the Secretary of State completely ignores much more relevant evidence.

Let me immediately refute the two central pivots on which the Secretary of State, yet again today, seeks to take credit for his record on the NHS. First, he says that the NHS treated nearly 650,000 more inpatient cases last year

[Mr. Meacher]

than in 1978, together with nearly 2·5 million outpatient attendances. Even a moment's reflection shows that that is a dubious and open-ended criterion of improvement, and it can just as readily be interpreted as implying the reverse. It says nothing about the quality of care, and, as cuts and closures bite deeper, it may simply reflect pressure for premature discharge in the face of rising demand for new medical care for those left on mounting waiting lists.

Not only that, but this increase in treatment is not entirely of new patients. A proportion — for all we know, a growing proportion — consists of the same people returning because their original treatment did not suffice. We do not know that for sure, but it cannot be denied. Furthermore, we resent, and I believe that the nation resents, the Government seeking to take credit for the fact that doctors, nurses and ancillary workers have dealt with more cases, when the Government's policies, leading to mass unemployment, housing and urban decay and rising social stress, are major factors behind the increase in illness in the first place. We also resent the fact that the Government seek to capitalise on the statistic of medical throughput with blithe disregard and deliberate sabotage of the community care facilities into which these people are being discharged.

Mr. Fowler: Does the hon. Gentleman regard the number of patients treated as being a true measure of the effectiveness of the NHS or not? If not, why, in 1976, did the then Secretary of State, in whose Department I think the hon. Gentleman served, say that more people were treated in hospital than ever before and that the number of day patients was also a record? Why should a Labour Government claim credit for that and not a Conservative Government?

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State should look at his own documents. On page 1 of the Health Service in England report, he will see that, on all the criteria that he has mentioned, the record of outpatient and inpatient attendances in the five years previous to the last five years is almost identical to that in the last five years. But my point is that—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the Minister for Health will listen to my answer. Neither in 1976 nor today is that an adequate measure of the performance of the NHS. It is an interesting and important one, and, as I said, we did as well as in the past five years, but it is not an adequate measure and Secretary of State is wrong to regard it as such.

The second arm of the Secretary of State's argument in defence of his NHS record is equally flawed. He pretends that there have not been cuts by talking up the 17 per cent. RPI increase in NHS expenditure over the past five years. In the previous five years, the increase in NHS expenditure under the previous Labour Government on exactly the same basis was 19 per cent. Much more important is that, in terms of what money will buy in the NHS—that is what really matters — the Social Services Select Committee made it clear that the increase was not 17 per cent. but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt) made clear earlier, 7 per cent. I am glad to note the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short), who is chairman of that Committee and who has done sterling work. When account is taken of that, as it must be, of rising demographic factors among the elderly——

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South) *rose——*

Mr. Meacher: I shall give way in a moment—and of the faster rising cost of medical technology, the increase was just about zero. That is the fact of the record over the past five years.

Mrs. Currie *rose——*

Mr. Meacher: I shall give way in a moment.

Indeed, Government figures published in *Hansard* on 16 January 1984—anyone can look at them—reveal that, after taking account of those necessary factors, expenditure on hospital and community health services in England over the past five years has declined by an average of 0·75 per cent. per year.

The House should remember that that is all against a background when the Government are already spending far less on health than any other comparable European country with, I think, the exception of Greece.

Mrs. Currie *rose——*

Mr. Meacher: If the hon. Lady persists in interrupting, I shall not give way.

We are seeing a decline in expenditure on hospital and community services—*[Interruption.]* I suggest that the Minister for Health looks at the figures himself. Here they are. That is against a background when the Government are already spending only 5·7 per cent. of GNP on health compared with 8 per cent. in France, 8 per cent. in Germany, 9·5 per cent. in the United States, and 10 per cent. in Sweden. The difference between those figures is billions.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The hon. Gentleman has used that argument before. He carefully misuses figures. He will use those other figures as a measure of spending. There is only one measure of spending, and that is the amount of money spent compared with the increase in the general level of inflation. On that basis, the increase has been 17 per cent. The rest of the figures that he is producing are technological nonsense, by which he tries to produce a deficit. Our proportion of GDP is lower than that of western European countries, partly because we are more economical in the delivery of our services, but it has increased. A higher proportion of GDP is being spent now than throughout most of the period of the previous Labour Government.

Mr. Meacher: The Minister is beginning to lose control of the argument if he suggests that pay and prices in the NHS are not the relevant factor. The RPI is irrelevant. What matters is the cost of pay and the provision of facilities and equipment in the NHS. By that measure, expenditure has increased. The Select Committee, on which the right hon. and learned Gentleman's hon. Friends had a majority, in its unanimous report, said that the increase was 7 per cent. Even that does not take into account the increased number of the elderly and the faster rising costs of medical technology. When that is taken into account, the increase is zero.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We must resolve the matter by a more careful use of language. If one is talking about spending, one is talking about the amount of money that is spent compared with the rate of inflation. When measuring spending, one cannot ignore that proportion of it which includes pay over and above the level of inflation. The input volume figure is a rough approximation of the

amount that that extra spending can purchase in the NHS when one takes into account the higher than average unit costs that the service has had, particularly for pay. It is an interesting figure. We still publish it and the Select Committee makes use of it, but it is not very important or accurate. As an attack on the Government's spending record it is utterly useless. The only measure of spending is how much the Government take from the taxpayer and put into the Health Service, and how that compares with inflation. The figure is 17 per cent. up, despite five years of recession.

Mr. Meacher: If the figure is nonsense, why does it say on page 4 of the Government's report, which they issued a week ago, that

"in terms of input volume — what money can buy for the Service — this means an increase of over 7 per cent.; this lower figure reflects the fact that Health Service costs rose faster than general inflation over this period."?

What matters to patients is what the Health Service provides. It is not particularly impressive if the Minister for Health simply talks about an artificial RPI that does not apply to the NHS.

Of the two main claims on which the Secretary of State bases his Health Service record, the first is misdirected and the second is downright wrong. In any case, they are not the most relevant criteria for judging the performance of the Health Service. I shall suggest some alternatives that are much more relevant.

For example, waiting times are already far too long and are rapidly becoming worse. A recent BMA survey—I have the record with me and can show it to any hon. Member who so wishes—reveals that, for all of the six main specialties reviewed, a majority of district health authorities have experienced a lengthening of waiting times during this past year, when there were no industrial disputes. Perhaps, therefore, the Secretary of State should stop making excuses by continually referring to trade unions, because the last dispute was two or three years ago. A majority found that there was a lengthening of waiting times during this past year and that in every case the increase was as much as 40 to 60 per cent. That is not a small, but a heck of a big increase.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): How would the Labour party's policy of abolishing the private medical sector affect the waiting lists?

Mr. Meacher: I am glad to answer that question. Our policy would considerably improve waiting lists, because long waiting lists give people a strong incentive to go private. If we had parallel waiting lists, which I personally favour, it would cause a far bigger drop in NHS waiting lists than any of the Secretary of State's measures.

Mr. Pavitt: The Secretary of State made great play of the increase in numbers as a result of industrial disputes. Does my hon. Friend recall the two consultants' disputes in 1974 and 1975 and the junior hospital doctors' dispute, when waiting lists increased by 100,000, and that the Conservative party supported those disputes?

Mr. Meacher: That is relevant. We are always told that we are responsible for industrial disputes, but on that occasion consultants were involved rather than ancillary workers. Perhaps Government supporters should rethink their line on the issue.

Mr. Fowler: The difference is that we did not back that dispute. The hon. Gentleman is wrong. His hon. Friends explicitly back industrial action.

Mr. Meacher: That is simply because the Government's attitude to industrial relations in the National Health Service, as elsewhere, is exceedingly provocative. We are talking not so much about support for a union as about opposition to the anti-trade union industrial practices in which the Government regularly indulge.

A second criterion, which is more relevant than those criteria most often quoted, is international comparison. On that score Britain still treats fewer kidney patients per head of population, performs fewer bypass operations and has a worse perinatal mortality rate than many comparable countries.

A third criterion is staff morale, which directly affects patient care. Anyone who has been in a hospital recently will know that currently staff morale is extremely low because of continual cuts, pay restraint and an ever-increasing work load.

A fourth criterion is expenditure on prevention and community care. They are target areas for any future quantum improvement in the nation's health. Currently expenditure on prevention is peanuts and on community care stagnant.

A fifth criterion is difficult to measure, but tell-tale indicators are beginning to appear. The level of cross-infection in hospitals is beginning to rise. The real lesson of the Stanley Royd food poisoning disaster at Wakefield is that lives were lost not just because of errors in food handling, but because there were not enough staff or equipment once the poisoning was discovered to ensure proper barrier nursing. In other words, cuts can kill, and, under this Government, cuts are killing.

Mrs. Currie: The hon. Gentleman cannot have read pages 2 and 3 of the report by the Social Services Select Committee to which he referred. It says that there has been a

"a 50 per cent. increase in new patients treated for end-stage renal failure; more than double the number of coronary artery bypass grafts; District nurse staffing increased by 15 per cent. between 1978 and 1983 and the number of old people treated by district nurses rose by nearly a quarter to nearly 1½ million."

Cross-infection is beginning to rise simply because more people are being treated in hospitals. I am talking about many hundreds of thousands more patients.

More than half the 17 per cent. to which the hon. Gentleman referred is represented by the resources put into the Health Service by this Government. We have increased pay, particularly to nurses. I can remember, even if the hon. Gentleman cannot, the time under the last Labour Government when we could not fill the places available because the pay was so pathetic.

Mr. Meacher: Of course, there have been increases in particular areas of health expenditure. There were before 1979, and the figures form a continually rising graph in many respects, but whether that means an improvement in overall quality is by no means certain. Overall spending is being decreased. I could reel off a list of health care aspects for which standards are declining. If I had the time I would do that.

I have described the criteria by which we should judge the Government's record. By those standards our National Health Service—I say "our" because the Prime Minister

[Mr. Meacher]

does not use it — has manifestly and seriously deteriorated under this Government. That deterioration has been gratuitously aggravated by the Government's obsession with privatisation. It is crystal clear that privatisation, as we have always said, is not about efficiency but about sleazy deals. It is about expense accounts, back-handers and lowered standards.

I shall cite some of the host of examples in the appalling record of privatisation. With the Sunlight Laundry, which operates for the Cheltenham and District health authority, only 15 per cent. of linen and pillowcases met the quality control standards. The DHSS recommends an acceptance level of 95 per cent. Seventy three per cent. of sheets were rejected. At the High Royds hospital in the Leeds Western health authority, the company involved is Hospital Hygiene Services. Dr. Terry Nelson, the head of the hospital's medical services committee, has complained to managers about erratic standards from the contractors. One senior nurse last week complained of faeces, urine and vomit on the floors.

A report by Dr. William Newsom, a bacteriologist from the Papworth hospital, revealed high levels of dust in clinical areas in the Hinchingbrooke geriatric hospital, Cambridgeshire, and concluded that there was a risk of patients being infected. The South West Thames authority noted that some laundry contractors would not accept badly soiled linen. Yet that is rather important for hospitals. Trent pointed out that private contractors could not always provide complex and special requirements as cheaply as the public sector.

Rather notorious is Crothalls at Barking in the Redbridge area. I quote a report by an independent health inspector commissioned by Redbridge community health council, which made some alarming observations — *[Interruption.]* The Minister of Health might find this funny, but I suggest that he listens to the consequences of what is happening to some of our people because of his policies.

In the kitchens, there were accumulations of dirt and grease in the corners of the preparation and cooking areas. Food debris had collected behind and beneath pieces of equipment that had not been removed for proper cleaning. There was a thick layer of grease and dirt under the utensils sink. The presence of dead and decomposing cockroaches showed the lack of regular and effective cleaning. I see that the Minister is not laughing now, because the position is serious. Several live cockroaches were also seen.

I want to give one more example that I know will impress the Minister for Health. A senior Conservative, Professor John Davis, who is one of the country's leading paediatricians, resigned a fortnight ago from Cambridge health authority in protest against political decisions to force hospital cleaning services to be privatised. In his letter of resignation, he said:

"You will know that my attitudes are essentially conservative, but there comes a time when one must be seen to live up to one's professed principles and true conservatism means recognising that the economy is made for man and not vice versa, given the necessary recognition that resources are not infinite."

I suggest that Conservative Members take account of that message.

Such examples give the lie to the Government's claim that privatisation is about greater efficiency. It is about greater profits for Tory shareholders. I do not include the Secretary of State and the Minister for Health in that, but I do include several of their colleagues, including some Conservative Back Benchers. They make their profits at the expense of forcing down the wages of some of the lowest paid people in our society.

The Barking hospital dispute is an illustration of that. The pay for cleaners is being cut by 40 per cent. Mr. Peter Pritchard, who was the chairman of Pritchards — the parent company of Barking hospital contractors, Crothalls —paid himself an additional £70,000 this year on top of his salary through a dividend increase because of record profits from privatisation. If those policies continue, the prospect that faces the NHS during the next five years is frightening.

According to a 17-page parliamentary answer that I received a fortnight ago, during the past five years 193 hospitals involving 14,000 beds have been closed by this Government. I accept that 35 hospitals have been opened, but there has been a net loss of 158.

The Secretary of State had the gall to speak today of 1 per cent. real growth in NHS resources. There was no growth last year, because the so-called Lawson cuts chopped 1 per cent. off the NHS budget. There will be no growth this year because the Secretary of State has forced health authorities to take out of their budgets for patient care a significant part of the pay award to nurses and ancillary staff. There will be no growth in future years, because, for example, the current draft South West Thames strategic plan reveals that that region is being forced by deepening Government cuts to halve the total of its acute beds over the next 10 years. That goes further than cuts. It is butchery.

It is planned that this process will be intensified. Many of those who defend the NHS and oppose cuts have been and continue to be blackballed off the RHAs and DHAs. That is being done in the most direct political manner possible. I have a hit list that has been drawn up by four Tory members of the South West Thames regional health authority selection panel. It shows, in the handwriting of one of the four Tory members, those who were not to be reappointed to the DHAs and the RHAs, those who were to be reappointed—all in strict accordance, as can be seen from the list, with party allegiance—and which of the four Tory members was to do the proposing at the committee meeting.

When all the opponents of cuts have been victimised, further cuts can be facilitated. That in itself encourages a further switch to private medical care. This process of steady decline for the NHS becomes circular and reinforcing with the announcement, which I take seriously, by the Secretary of State a month or so ago that the private sector has now grown so much that it must be taken into account when NHS funds are allocated. To rob the Health Service, which is already starved, of yet more money, on the ground that some well-off people have taken to using private clinics, would be as destructive and unfair as depriving state education of funds in areas where there are public schools. It would be to use the effects of a bad policy as a reason for making that bad policy even worse. Yet that is precisely the self-reinforcing pattern of decline that the NHS now faces.

Health authorities are stacked now with compliant Tory placemen. That opens the way for deeper cuts and encourages the development of private health care, and that is used to justify further cuts in the NHS. For the

Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues to say that the NHS is safe in their hands is the final insult. It is about as safe as the Conqueror's logbook in the Belgrano affair.

Mr. Fowler: I noted what the hon. Gentleman wrote in his pamphlet on that score. There is no truth in what he says. I have not asked health authorities to do what he suggests. The hon. Gentleman has talked about political influence. Has he not written to all Labour members of health authorities asking them to identify Labour supporters on those authorities? Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will explain his reasons for doing so.

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State was reported as saying that as the private sector has grown significantly, it should be taken into account in the allocation of NHS funds. I am glad to hear that the right hon. Gentleman did not mean what he said, but he said it none the less.

I have written to Labour members of health authorities. I am sure that I was right to do so. I have written to those who are known to be Labour sympathisers—there are a few left—who are members of regional and district health authorities. I have asked them to make clear, according to their knowledge, the political affiliations of those who sit on the authorities. I want also a list of those who have not been reappointed or who have been removed from office, those who have been appointed in their place and, where it is known, the political affiliations of all those persons.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: What for?

Mr. Meacher: I shall tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman what for. He has been pursuing a campaign of political victimisation against all those who support the NHS and oppose cuts. I intend to stop this Tory hit-listing by providing the public and the electorate with the details of what is happening.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The hon. Gentleman probably suspects that so many of the recipients of his letters have been outraged by their contents that I and many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have been shown copies of them. I am disgusted and so are members of health authorities. If he will place a copy of one of his letters before the House, it will make clear that he has been seeking information on the political affiliations of members of health authorities and trying to introduce a whipping or caucus system involving pre-meetings with local Labour parties and Labour groups. It is sheer humbug for him to complain about the introduction of politics in the Health Service and to criticise non-political appointments to authorities throughout the country.

Mr. Meacher: To accuse me of introducing politics into the NHS is the most incredible hypocrisy to come from the right hon. and learned Gentleman. When I have the facts, I think that they will support my case, not his. There is nowhere near a political balance in the membership of regional and district health authorities. I doubt whether there is more than a handful of district and regional health authorities where there is a Labour chairman. I suspect—I do not know the facts, but I shall get them—that about 80 per cent. of the chairmen of health authorities are Tories. If that is supposed to be even-handed and balanced membership, I suggest that the right hon. and learned Gentleman should use a dictionary.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North) *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: No, I shall not give way. I have been speaking for a considerable time, largely because of interruptions.

Mr. Greenway *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I shall not give way.

Even this Government do not claim that the welfare state is safe in their hands. If they did, they would be stretching their credibility beyond the limit. Single pensioners are being robbed of £2·80 a week, which matters a great deal to those on that standard of living. Married pensioners are being robbed of £4·65 a week by the Government's break with the uprating link with earnings.

The Government's abolition of the earnings-related supplement to unemployment benefit robs the average unemployed man—there are almost 4 million in the dole queues—of about £16 a week. Unemployment benefit is being taxed for the first time under this Government. Yet, at the same time, they have handed out £360 million to the very rich—those with more than £100,000 of stocks and shares—with the abolition of the investment income surcharge. Perhaps worst of all, the Government apparently believe that those on long-term supplementary benefit with the heating addition are so well off that in three weeks' time £1 is to be knocked off their benefit by the iniquitous scale margin.

If the Secretary of State or other Ministers had to live out that to which they so glibly sentence others, they would not be so ready to grind the faces of the poor. The trouble is that the hard-nosed occupants of the Government Front Bench, from the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer downwards, have no idea of and no interest in what it is like to be condemned to poverty and despair in Thatcher's Britain.

I shall be able to deal quickly with social security in the Gracious Speech because it is rather like the Sherlock Holmes dog which failed to bark in the night—memorable by its virtual absence. Unmentioned are the so-called five Fowler reports, which the Secretary of State likes to call the most radical review in total of the welfare state since Beveridge. Given the Government record, that is Fowlerspeak for the most radical dismantling of the welfare state since Beveridge.

The Gracious Speech refers only to the already much heralded and much debated 5 per cent. annual revaluation of pensions for early leavers and the provision of more information for occupational scheme members. We agree in principle with the provision of more information for those in occupational pension schemes, but we wait to see whether that provision will go far enough in practice. The 5 per cent. annual revaluation is deeply flawed on two counts. The Government know that 5 per cent. is well below the historic trend figure for earnings. Secondly, and more importantly, it excludes existing pensioners because it applies only to benefits earned from next January. That is wholly unfair and discriminatory.

The Secretary of State has been a pushover for the drug, tobacco, food and Health Service equipment supply companies. He has become a soft touch to the occupational pension schemes. What a tragedy it is that the only people to whom the Secretary of State is apparently able to show his virility are those living in poverty—trade unionists working for him in Newcastle, from whom he arbitrarily stole bonuses of up to £14 a week, and miners, from whom

[Mr. Meacher]

he purloined £15 a week, even when the NUM could not pay that money because its funds had been sequestrated. That is the type of policy in which the Secretary of State believes.

Even if the Queen's Speech is a mouse in social security terms, a counter-revolution — of course, it is unmentioned—is gathering pace against the welfare state, led, under this Government's leader, not by Robin Hood but by the Sheriff of Nottingham. Like everything else they have done, the Government have loaded the dice.

The Fowler reviews are anything but independent, unprejudiced inquiries; they are fixed up to the eyeballs. With the exception of one, which is headed by the chairman of the London Brick Co. Ltd.—obviously he was chosen because of his great knowledge of housing benefit — they are all chaired by Ministers. That is virtually unprecedented. The reviews are crammed with carefully-selected, card-carrying Tory party members, which makes it abundantly clear that the whole exercise is just one of going through the motions as camouflage for predetermined conclusions.

When I specifically asked by letter for a more balanced membership of the inquiries the Secretary of State refused. External contributors were given only two months to make submissions. Each review has been made subject to a nil extra cost constraint, which means that open-minded examination of what is required to meet identified needs —such an examination is needed—is impossible. When completed, the reviews will not be published. Even by this Government's standards of using power and patronage to eliminate all opposition, this is the most stitched-up con trick that I have ever come across in my political life.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Many Conservative Members understand the hon. Gentleman's grave difficulty, in the context of the language of Socialism, of bringing perspective or relevance to the matters about which he is talking. Does he agree that it is prudent, sensible and right for the Government to conduct a thorough review of the welfare state, bearing in mind that no such in-depth review has been conducted since Beveridge in 1945?

Mr. Meacher: Of course I believe that it is right to do that. If I were conducting the reviews, I would have independent chairmen and a balanced membership and allow sufficient time for proper research and examination. I would not impose a nil cost constraint. I would publish the reviews' results. That is the difference.

Mr. Greenway: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I shall not give way.

Even though it is all sewn up and the time scale is telescoped to a minimum——

Mr. Fowler: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: I shall not give way. I have been speaking for nearly an hour, and I am extremely conscious of the fact that I should draw my speech to a close, and I propose to do so.

The Government, despite the telescoping of the time scale, could not bear to wait even a few months to do the decent thing and let the reviews report. The Government want blood now. That is why we have had newspaper leaks of £3 billion cuts in the offing, including £1 billion of social security cuts. The post "star chamber" Cabinet meeting to take final decisions on the cuts was held this morning, but in a monumentally diversionary speech this afternoon the Secretary of State contrived to say not one word about it. One wonders why.

I submit that it is a real abuse of the rationale of Parliament that we are called here to debate the relatively minor issues in the Queen's Speech including social security when the massive importance of those decisions on cuts which will dominate the lives of millions of our people and Parliament's programme for next year is completely ignored. Already, according to *The Times* of 25 June—that is hardly a pro-Socialist organ—social security cuts of £6·5 billion have so far been made by the Government. If further swingeing cuts are now made, as the leaks clearly reveal and the Government's record manifestly suggests, they will no doubt be done by means-testing, by taxing child benefit, by further major cuts in housing benefit, by uprating unemployment benefit by significantly less than the inflation rate or—I see that the Secretary of State is smiling — by uprating all benefits on less than an annual basis.

I have to tell the Secretary of State that any one of those measures would do enormous damage to the welfare of millions of people. If that is the only way in which the Government can balance the books—when, according to the Government's successive Budget statements, they have already handed out cumulatively no less than £13 billion to the richest 5 per cent. of the population—they should make way for an alternative Government whose health and social security policies reflect far more closely the priorities of the British people.

4.16 pm

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): If the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) had not had any responsibility for the DHSS during the time of the last Labour Government, his strictures would have been more convincing. As it was, his speech was rather wild and woolly—in marked contrast to the superb speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who addressed himself to the main issues facing the National Health Service and the social security system.

I was disappointed that no reference was made in the Queen's Speech to the Health Service. The Health Service is vital to our country and the issues revolving around it are so important that that was a curious omission. It may be argued that the Queen's Speech concentrated on the economy, and, because of that, that is the point at which I shall start.

As we know, the Government's view of the monetary disciplines within the economy is fundamentally that of maintaining supply and demand as the overriding criterion and their view could be described as almost fundamentalist. It is argued that demand will be the trigger for supply. The Government have eschewed any attempt to stimulate demand on the basis of the already being sufficient demand in the economy and in the Western world to increase supply. Some Ministers have argued, and continue to argue, that if only the Government took less in taxation there would be more demand in the economy from which supply would increase and jobs would be created — hence, the need to hold public spending. It is contended that to stimulate demand artificially is to stoke up inflation again, which could have disastrous effects.

In those two-dimensional terms, the logic of supply and demand seems to be irrefutable but, thanks to some research by my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Mr. Body), I suggest that there is a third dimension that is seldom, if ever, referred to—need. The famine in Ethiopia is a classic example of need—the desperate need for food felt by hundreds of thousands of people. If they could receive that food only on the basis of their being able to pay for it, they would starve to death, but, thank goodness, our faith in economic disciplines is not so inflexible that we insist on payment before coming to their rescue. If Ethiopia demonstrates that need is a dimension that can never be left out of the economic argument—at least when it is a matter of life and death—does it not have a similar application in our nation? I believe that it does, in terms of health care, because health care is about life and death.

As some hon. Members may know, since last January I have been the victim of a rare kidney disease. Without kidney dialysis, I would be a dead man. In the months during which I have been receiving treatment in hospital, I have cost the National Health Service tens of thousands of pounds—much more than I could have afforded privately; and, although I am a member of BUPA, it is a service that it does not provide because of the expense. Had my treatment depended on my ability to pay, I would not be alive today. The NHS met my need for treatment without requiring me to show that I had funds to pay for it. It operated on supply and need, not supply and demand. That will always remain true of the NHS. That is why it is such a precious asset to us all.

It may be argued that, thank God, kidney failure is a fairly rare disease. It is not a common illness and requires expensive specialist services which do not apply to ordinary illnesses such as flu and colds. Therefore, while it may be reasonable to argue that need should dominate, when dealing with these more commonplace illnesses from which we all suffer, there is no reason why supply and demand—the ability to pay—should not at least play a part in considering how we should pay for the Health Service.

From that it may be inferred that, while need is an important consideration in judging the cost of the Health Service, supply and demand is a discipline which is also there and will remain a constant part. In those terms it is perfectly reasonable to look at the Health Service under an economic microscope to see where savings could be made. All of us must be impressed by some of the savings to which my right hon. Friend referred. In so far as those saving are going towards patient care, who could object to any of that money, if it is being wasted, being used where it is most needed?

I agree with my right hon. Friend's view, which is shared by many in the Health Service, that what Roy Griffiths has identified as the need for better administration is a crucial part of getting better value out of the Health Service. It is generally recognised that hospital administration has not been the profession that it should be. In some ways it bears resemblance to the management of hotels. After all, many of the services provided by hospitals are provided by hotels. I hope that we shall see a new breed of professional administrator who is used to dealing with the problems of providing beds and food, organising domestic help and ensuring adequacy of supplies.

We must also never forget that hospitals involve staffing—both doctors and nurses—the cost of drugs and the cost of specialist equipment. I am unhappy about the figures that have been given about the increase in the number of inpatients and outpatients and of doctors and nurses. We are told that the Health Service treated 450,000 more inpatients in 1983 than in 1978 as well as looking after 2·5 million more outpatients. Over that same period the number of hospital doctors has increased by 3,100. Therefore, each new doctor is being asked to treat 112 new inpatients or 800 outpatients.

Nursing numbers have increased by 38,700—one new nurse to every 11 new inpatients. I can speak only for the hospitals that I have been in since I was ill in January, but there the ratio is approximately one nurse to six beds. Therefore, if we talk about one nurse to 11 beds, we talk about a nursing service that is desperately over-stretched. Those figures are the roughest of rough calculations. They allow nothing for reductions in nursing hours, which change the figure of 38,000 drastically, or for the intensive type of nursing that is often required, when frequently the ratio is one nurse to one patient, or even two or three nurses to one patient.

In the dialysis ward that I visit three times a week, the nursing level is officially for nine patients, yet there are 14 patients in the ward. Without the auxiliaries to support the nurses, the job could not be done. Even as it is, if there is any ill health among the nursing staff, the ward is clearly desperately over-stretched. It may be argued that the nursing level is too high for nine beds, but we must be careful not to allow economies to distort nursing care too far the other way.

I know that many senior nurses and sisters believe that what is now happening is a cause for concern and that we ought to be asking whether we are allowing our nursing levels to become dangerously over-stretched. It may be argued that if there is slack in the service it is right to take it up before embarking on ever-increasing expenditure. As has been said so many times already, the NHS, which was costing £7·5 billion in 1978, is set to cost £17·5 billion in 1985.

The drugs bill, to which my hon. Friend referred, is always increasing, but I am not convinced that that is because the drug companies are making massive profits. We sometimes forget the enormous cost of producing new drugs and that on average only one new drug emerges from 10,000 originally synthesised. The period from patenting to commercial launch frequently lasts up to 10 to 12 years, and the cost of development can be about £60 million per drug.

When these considerations are weighed, perhaps the drug companies are not quite the profit-grasping organisations which it is sometimes suggested they are. Whatever the case, the drugs bill is another call on NHS resources, and I entirely accept that any Government, faced with the dilemma of increasing costs, meeting needs and knowing that they must maintain the service at a certain level, will have to make some difficult choices in their priorities.

Although I have misgivings about the present situation, I do not accept the argument that the shortcomings in patient-doctor relationships are the result of overworked doctors not having the time to get to know their patients, or that nurses are so run off their feet that they cannot find

[Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson]

time for gentle care. That is why I introduced my patients' charter in September, with its proposals for improving patients' rights.

Mr. Jack Dormand (Easington): The Opposition very much welcome the hon. Gentleman's return to the House. He has been greatly missed, and is one of the nicest hon. Members. In addition, he always makes notable contributions to our debates; he is demonstrating that again today. In view of his recent experience, we are delighted to see him back.

The hon. Gentleman referred to priorities. One of the minor but important aspects of health is preventive medicine and health education. In real terms, the Government have reduced the resources allocated to health education and preventive medicine. Is that one of the priorities which ought to be cut or which should go lower down the scale?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words about me. What he has said is one of the priorities which any Secretary of State should look at. It must be a matter of personal judgment as to where it should go in the list of priorities, but I recognise the hon. Gentleman's po:nt.

The patients' charter which I introduced in September contained proposals for improving patients' rights. I sent a copy to the DHSS, but I am sorry to say that apparently it has made no impression on anyone there. I have not heard whether it is thought that it is not worth the paper it was written on or, indeed, whether it had ever been received. Perhaps the Department is making the same mistake as some of the medical staff whom I criticised in the preamble to the charter—of forgetting that patients are the reason why there is a Health Service. They are its customers, and their rights must be considered and safeguarded. Judging by the huge amount of mail that I have received about the charter, my concern is shared by many other people, including doctors and nurses, and I shall willingly make all my correspondence available to my right hon. Friend or his hon. Friends if they would like to see it.

Whether it be the prescribing of the wrong drugs by hospitals to patients with allergies when a telephone call to their GPs would prevent the mistake, or the unscheduled errors necessitating surgery and sometimes disfigurement, the patient is the sufferer, generally without any compensation unless something major has happened. My right hon. Friend will know that there are no national statistics on medical negligence claims, but he may also be aware that Action for the Victims of Medical Accidents estimates that there are more than 10,000 such claims current in England.

I have received marvellous treatment from so many doctors and nurses working in the National Health Service that I shall always be indebted to them and hope that I shall always be a champion of the service.

Modern medicine seems able to work miracles, to the point where I think some young doctors believe that they have most of the answers to whatever disease they are treating. That may be so, but the anxious patient that they are looking after is still a creature of flesh and blood, nerves and feelings. He still wants kindness, encouragement and hope, wants to know what is wrong with him and how he is to be treated. He wants his anxieties to be allayed. It is the task of those working in the Health Service to meet his needs. It is the responsibility of all of us who have any responsibility for the Health Service to ensure that it has the means to do that, even if it results in more expenditure.

4.30 pm

Mrs. Renée Short (Wolverhampton, North-East): The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. McNair-Wilson) has paid a moving tribute to the members of medical and nursing professions who have looked after him. I am sure that we are all delighted to see him back in the House. We warmly endorse what he said about the National Health Service.

I share the hon. Gentleman's view about the contents of the Gracious Speech. It must be the first one for a considerable period to omit any reference — with the exception of occupational pension rights—to the social services. There is nothing about the National Health Service, except an ominous statement that firm control of public spending will be maintained. We do not object to that, but we are concerned about the way in which that control is to be exercised and about those parts of the NHS which are likely to suffer as a result.

There is nothing in the Gracious Speech about nursery education. I am sorry that the Secretary of State for Education and Science has departed; I had hoped that he would stay for the debate. There is nothing about unemployment benefit or local authority housing. The latter is an area to which the Secretary of State for Social Services will look when his proposals for care in the community come to fruition, because local authority housing will have to undertake some of the burdens now carried by the long-stay mental illness and mental handicap hospitals. There needs to be some transfer of resources into that area, or the creation of additional resources, if the policy is to be carried out successfully.

There is nothing in the Gracious Speech about any attempt to curb smoking or cigarette advertising. There is nothing to deal with the problem of over-prescribing of drugs. If the Secretary of State wants to save Health Service expenditure, he can look fruitfully at that area. There is over-prescribing by doctors and by those, such as receptionists, whom they depute to write out repeat prescriptions. What is the Department doing about that problem?

There are great disparities in the periods for which drugs are prescribed. Receptionists write out repeat prescriptions without knowing why it is being done, the conditions for which the drugs are being prescribed, or the quantities which should be prescribed. It is a very serious situation. Those doctors who do not over-prescribe, and pharmacists who are on the receiving end of the prescriptions and see the waste of drugs, and therefore the waste of money and resources, are equally concerned about the problem.

I suspect that millions of pounds worth of NHS money are flushed down lavatories when people empty their medicine chests and throw away medicines and pills. Often they have forgotten the reasons why those medicines were prescribed. Something must be done about the problem, because it involves a dreadful waste of resources which should be used in other areas of the NHS which are at present under-financed.

The Gracious Speech refers to the decisions to abolish the Greater London council and the metropolitan councils,

including the one in the west midlands. The Prime Minister does not seem to like them any more than they like her, and I suppose that leaves us even.

There are doctrinaire proposals to remove the nationalised bus services. Those proposals will have a disastrous effect on rural areas in particular. They will involve great cost for all those who need public transport if they are to travel at all.

There are no proposals to deal with the urgent problem of replacing our outdated and derelict sewerage system or the water supply system. They are either inadequate or worn out and outdated. Those services should be provided, because they have a considerable bearing on the health of the community. The failure to replace those services also affects the level of unemployment.

There is no commitment to a building and construction programme to absorb even part of the massive number of unemployed. The Prime Minister knows as well as I do that that would be one of the most effective ways of injecting life into our depressed economy, providing jobs, and revitalising the building materials industry and the manufacture of appliances.

It is a major scandal that there is no mention of the plight of the NHS. There is no mention of the effects of the doctrinaire enforced privatisation of hospital services, with which my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) dealt effectively and at some length. There is no mention of the enforced closure of beds because of the lack of money to pay nurses. There is no attempt to maintain the commitment given to develop the maternity services or to replace ancient and outdated hospitals. They are, incidentally, hospitals in which a great deal of very good medicine is being practised, in spite of the buildings and conditions.

There is no mention of the commitment to appoint the consultant staff needed to provide a better and more effective service to patients. Long waiting lists still persist in practically every region. In my constituency, even patients suffering acute pain and very severe disability are still waiting four years for knee replacement operations. That is a very serious situation.

However, the Government have achieved what no other Government before them have achieved—the highest number of hospital staff during one year who have been forced to go on strike to defend their jobs. The Government have also achieved a serious fall in morale among medical staff, and among consultants at teaching hospitals, who have heavy responsibilities not only for the care of patients but for teaching and training the next generation of doctors. They are very concerned at the constant pressures that they have to meet because of the lack of resources, and the shortage of staff which is part of the problem of lack of resources.

Housing capital expenditure has fallen by 38 per cent. since 1979, total capital spending has fallen by 2 per cent., and local authorities are now unable to make use of accrued capital receipts for housing investment. Capital receipts are expected to fall sharply next year. Therefore, the outlook is very poor for improving the housing conditions of many people, including large numbers in depressed areas in the west midlands, who now live in sub-standard private housing and equally sub-standard and ancient local authority housing built in the first flush of publicly financed housing. They are doomed to spend much longer periods in sub-standard housing. There is serious disrepair in the public and private sectors.

I should like to say a few words to the absent Secretary of State for Education and Science. The teaching of science and technology is of crucial importance to Britain. We expect universities to respond to the needs of medicine, industry and commerce. Information technology, computer science and business administration are areas in which there is an urgent need to expand.

Research on high technology and involvement with industry are crucial, but our universities have suffered massive cuts in their UGC grants over the past four years. For example, Aston university has sustained an enormous cut of 40 per cent. It has been forced to reduce student numbers by 2,000, academic staff from 500 to 300, and non-academic staff from 1,000 to 650. All the technological universities have suffered comparable reductions, yet it is acknowledged that increasing our lead in technological and scientific research is an essential ingredient for maintaining our future. Perhaps the absent Secretary of State for Education and Science will explain why we are pursuing such a punitive and destructive policy, and why he tolerates it.

Our future depends to a large degree on our universities and polytechnics. Much of the research is long-term in character and cannot show results at the end of a given financial year or give an immediate cash return, yet it is of vital importance that it should continue. The Government, who pride themselves on the fact that the Prime Minister had a scientific education, show a complete lack of understanding of, and disregard for, the need to safeguard our future progress in science and to invest liberally in higher education. That is where our future lies—from the point of view not only of teaching and academic research, but of industrial progress. The Gracious Speech merely shows that the present narrow-minded monetarist policies are to be maintained.

The Social Services Select Committee has reported on the effects of the University Grants Committee cuts on medical teaching and research. It is the intention of the Committee to monitor progress during the next two and a half years and to see how the situation develops. I wonder what the Secretary of State intends to do to meet the demand for higher education from men and women students.

The Gracious Speech says nothing about any expansion of university teaching. However—I suppose that we ought to raise the flag about this—there is to be a Bill to allow parents to exempt their children from corporal punishment. The provisions will apply only in local authority schools. They will not apply to the public schools. Conservative Members will know more about that than I do, having been on the receiving end. What about those local authorities which still allow corporal punishment? We seem to be making very slow progress in that area.

I am delighted to see that the Secretary of State for Education and Science has returned to his place.

Mr. Greenway: The delight is not mutual.

Mrs. Short: Not mutual? The hon. Gentleman does not know.

I wonder why the Secretary of State did not take his courage in both hands and ban corporal punishment in all schools. Of whom is he afraid? He should have second thoughts on the matter. To beat a child is a degrading and disgusting act, particularly for the petty offences with

[Mrs. Short]

which some head teachers seem to be obsessed. I am sorry to say that some Labour-controlled local authorities still allow corporal punishment in their schools. I urge the Secretary of State to get rid of corporal punishment once and for all. There are other ways of dealing with naughty schoolchildren.

No single year's programme could possibly rectify six years' devastation such as my own constituency has suffered. We have over 16 per cent. unemployment, our factories are closing, and many of those factories are disgusting places which need to be replaced. The whole of the west midlands is a gravely disadvantaged area. Our young people have no prospects of decent jobs. I have set this problem before the House on many occasions, but the Government seem to have it in for the west midlands. They seem to intend to allow the area to moulder away for the foreseeable future.

The Gracious Speach contains irrelevances, such as the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan councils, including the West Midlands county council, and the insistence on futile and wasteful privatisation schemes in the midst of a ruinous coal strike. The Prime Minister seems determined to allow that strike to continue. She is not prepared to intervene.

The Gracious Speech marks the nadir of the Government's incompetence. I hope that the Secretary of State for Education and Science will be able to tell us where progress is to be made and where resources are to be provided in order to establish a base for the scientific progress that we need if we are to survive in the competitive world. I hope also that steps will be taken urgently to see that the coal industry strike, which has lasted for many months, will not be allowed to fester on for much longer. If the Government allow the strike to continue, the country will realise that they are not fit to govern.

4.46 pm

Mr. John Ward (Poole): The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-West (Mrs. Short) will forgive me if I do not continue in the same vein. I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this debate, and I welcome the promise made in the Gracious Speech to continue with the control of public expenditure, and to increase the functions of the private sector wherever possible—in short, to continue to ensure that the taxpayer and the ratepayer get full value for money.

However, I must confess to disappointment that there is no reference in the Gracious Speech to the Warnock committee's report. I wish to refer briefly to two aspects of that report. In the previous Session, my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mrs. McCurley) introduced a ten-minute Bill with the aim of controlling maternal surrogate clinics. She was given permission to bring in the Bill but, inevitably, it was lost through shortage of parliamentary time. As one of my hon. Friend's supporters on that occasion, I should like to remind my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health of the great concern which still exists about this subject.

The arguments were well set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde on 31 January 1984. It has, I believe, always been our concern that in family affairs the interests of the children should be paramount. I therefore find it difficult to understand why we are allowing commercial activities to enter this field, with large sums of money changing hands in an attempt to provide a child for childless couples.

I do not underestimate the distress that inability to have a child, with the continual round of medical tests and examinations, can cause to a married couple. But we must also consider the well-being of any child which may be produced by surrogate motherhood, particularly when a commercial organisation is involved. The child would be illegitimate, with all the legal complications which that entails. Also, little consideration seems to have been given to what would happen if the surrogate mother produced a handicapped child. Would she keep it? Would the potential parents perhaps refuse to proceed with adoption? We should have acquiesced in the production of a human being more in need of love and affection than a normal child and yet, by the process of surrogate motherhood, have put its future happiness at risk.

Last September, my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health condemned an American "babies for sale" scheme. Clearly he is as concerned as I am about such commercial activity. I hope that we shall shortly hear that he proposes to do something about the problem.

Speaking as someone with a scientific qualification—not in the medical field—I would be the first to agree that not all scientific progress is necessarily human progress. I have received much support in my objection to maternal surrogate clinics, and I believe that the House should be given an early opportunity to debate and to legislate upon the matter. The Government could do no better than examine again the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde, which would simply prohibit the operation of maternal surrogate clinics in the United Kingdom. Such a measure would receive support on both sides of the House.

The other matter that I wish to raise with my right hon. Friend relates to proposals in the Warnock report for the use of human embryos in medical research. The report recommends that research conducted on human in vitro embryos and their handling should be permitted only under licence. It also recommends that such embryos should be allowed to be kept alive for only 14 days. I have received an enormous amount of correspondence on this subject and every letter opposes such a proposal.

Most hon. Members probably instinctively find such a proposal distasteful, but it is our duty to examine its more long-term effects. For example, will 14 days be long enough? An argument is probably already being marshalled somewhere to the effect that experiments on embryos would serve humanity if they were allowed to proceed beyond the 14-day limit. Many of us have worked through organisations such as FRAME—the Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments—to reduce the use of animals in medical research. It would be intolerable if, when FRAME is having some success, a market should be established for human embryos—even under licence.

Other European countries have already had to consider this problem. The vast majority of British people probably agree with Sir John Peel, who said:

> "You do not use a human as a guinea pig unless it is a bona fide attempt to improve the condition of that individual. No one can conceive that experimenting on an artificially-produced embryo can be to the benefit of that embryo. The argument that it might benefit others is a red herring."

It is easy to state the problems and the dilemmas which we shall face when we come to debate or, indeed, to pass legislation concerned with the Warnock report, but I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health will acknowledge that this is a matter in which sensitivity is needed and that it is of great concern to many people who we represent in the House. It is no exaggeration to say that if legislation which would affect the matters about which I have been speaking is introduced, the vast majority of us hope that it will be on a free vote because it would be difficult to support some of the Warnock report's recommendations.

I nevertheless pay tribute to the work done by the Warnock committee. It has produced a document which will allow us to consider scientific progress and its effects on the human race for many years to come. It does not follow, however, that we must accept all of its recommendations. I hope that the House will shortly have the opportunity to make its views known on at least the two matters that I have mentioned this afternoon.

Genetic engineering opens a problem for humanity, and the House should not duck its responsibilities in this regard. These matters are of great concern to many deep thinking people in Britain. They are of great concern to the Council of Europe and, I suspect, other countries. I have the honour to be one of the House's representatives at the Council of Europe. The 21 nations that meet there have already become aware that human genetic engineering in all its aspects is a complicated, difficult and, above all, sensitive matter. I hope that the Government will co-operate with any international group that seeks their aid. Perhaps I might use a Chinese proverb: humanity must not travel too fast for its soul to follow.

A market has already been set up in the United States to provide babies for childless couples, and we can see the beginnings of such a market in this country. The Warnock report has produced the facts and some recommendations. It is for this House, I believe, to take the moral decision as to whether the report's recommendations should be implemented. I hope that we shall get the opportunity to make that decision soon.

Whatever arguments the House may adduce, and however we may divide on political lines on other subjects, we can surely agree that protecting our children and children yet to be born is a measure of our concern for civilisation itself.

4.53 pm

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): I shall not continue the line of thought taken by the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Ward) in regard to the Warnock report, except to say that I agree that it considers matters that are of considerable concern to us all. I, too, hope that we shall have an opportunity to debate it. Dealing with moral arguments through legislation is fraught with immense problems. As the hon. Gentleman said, the House is not divided on partisan lines in such matters.

I regret that the Gracious Speech does not mention health and health care. I hope that that does not suggest that we can expect only a continuation of existing policy and practice. I am doubtful about the Government's continued concentration on management and efficiency and therefore on statistics that assist the Secretary of State in this compartment of the NHS. No one doubts that management and efficiency are an aspect of the Secretary of State's work but the difficulty is that they skew examination of problems in the NHS. The key question that faces any Secretary of State is whether the country is more healthy. The Government keep saying that the NHS treats more patients than when Labour was in power. That does not indicate a healthy society but greater demand for treatment, which is quite different.

We should put far greater emphasis on helping individuals and communities to be healthier. The Secretary of State referred to his speech at the Conservative party conference at Brighton. I watched him make that speech. He reworked it today but, then as now, its great defect was its failure to mention prevention or self-help care. For example, the National Advisory Committee on Nutrition Education report on the effect of food and food additives on health has been suppressed, although we know that unhealthy eating kills. Each year, 30,000 men in Britain aged under 65 die from heart disease whereas other European countries have been able to reduce the incidence of such deaths. Moreover, 100,000 people die each year as a result of smoking-related diseases but we still permit cigarette advertising to be associated with sporting events, thus psychologically linking healthy pastimes and smoking. I deplore that.

Alcohol Concern has spotlighted the effects of alcohol abuse. Apart from the effects of alcohol abuse on health, road accidents and crime, it estimates that £2 billion is lost to industry each year because of dependence on alcohol or alcohol abuse. When other countries such as the United States are doing so much to wean people from alcohol addiction, why are we doing so little and to so little effect? Each year 2,000 women die from cervical cancer although statistics show that 90 per cent. of them have never been screened. Far more could be done to promote screening by broadening out remuneration to doctors and ending apparently restrictive age limits.

This morning, I was able to pay a brief visit to the spinal unit at the royal national orthopaedic hospital. The vast majority of cases there arise from road accidents. We know that motor cycle accidents are proportionally 27 times more common than those involving motor cars and yet we do not examine regulatory means of preventing people from damaging themselves. For example, the minimum age for driving a car is higher than that for driving a motor cycle. One means of inhibiting young people from riding motor cycles is to make the age limit the same.

There is a lack of linkage between services. Rate capping and rate penalties are deleterious to health care. The increased number of people who now have to do without home helps means that some will have to be drawn into hospital or other institutional care far earlier. The lack of a broader definition of people requiring attendance allowances means that people will require institutional care before they would otherwise need it.

Other Government Departments could also help massively to prevent people from needing treatment. It is well known that housing conditions contribute considerably to health, yet since 1979 the massive cuts in finance available for housing have meant that the general health level has declined considerably. Despite that, Conservative Members appear not to realise that present housing finance policy will mean that even more people will suffer a deterioration in their health as housing conditions decline. Local authorities may, in theory, have the alternatives of rehabilitation and redevelopment, but unless houses are rehabilitated on a regular basis every 15

[Mr. Michael Meadowcroft]

or 20 years, they will have to be demolished. People will be forced increasingly into unsatisfactory accommodation because we do not look after our housing stock.

Similarly, our system to enable people to pay fuel costs is manifestly inadequate. A lack of attention to heating affects health. Social security support for fuel costs cannot meet the immense rises in energy costs of the past 10 years. Yet we do not link that with the possibility of preventing people from requiring health care. Health care is more expensive than helping people to pay their heating costs.

My final point regarding prevention relates to collaboration with the voluntary sector. I commend the Government's work on drug abuse. It is to their credit that they have given grant-aid to organisations that work to prevent drug abuse and to promote rehabilitation and treatment. The Government's approach has not been at all narrow-minded. I applaud their introduction of further measures.

However, it is sad that such local projects are not similarly treated in collaboration with the voluntary sector. We should learn from the experiments of women's movements, such as the well woman clinics. They have shown what can be done in health care, which men have failed to grasp in years past. There are many good practices going on in individual ways and we should examine them to see how they can be translated for the greater good. It is no use believing that care in the community can work by diktat. It will not be beneficial to move people out of institutions if we do not support the institutions required to help people in the community.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has a point about partisan appointments to health authorities. The political credentials of appointees are undoubtedly being examined carefully. What is more, those appointments are now considered at ministerial level. Much anxiety is expressed about the diminution of pluralism in our democracy. We shall not be able to involve people in our democratic processes if they believe that they can be appointed to a body that exercises authority and influence only if they belong to a particular political party. Such a position would be dangerous.

It is sad that many organisations that are beneficial to the Health Service and the social services and that are funded by both local authorities and the Government are treated in the same way by the far Left as by the Right. A voluntary body in Hackney will find that its local authority will believe that if a job is worth doing it should be done by the state. If local authorities are to determine their grant-giving practices by political criteria, the same is true. I hope that the hon. Member for Oldham, West will condemn such a practice, if it is carried out by members of his own party, just as he condemned the Government for it in health authorities.

Social conditions are deteriorating generally. There are rare outbreaks of salmonella poisoning, but we should be worried about regular outbreaks of various kinds in institutional care. The public health aspect of care has brought the greatest good for the greatest number in our history. The extension of the expectation of life has not come through technology and surgical skills, but through the improvements of water supplies and the development of public health. Unfortunately, it is in those areas that our social conditions are deteriorating.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. John Patten): I always listen with care to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft). I am grateful for his remarks about the Government's drugs initiative, which I hope will receive all-party support.

I listened to the hon. Gentleman's voice that expressed, almost with J. B. Priestley-like reasonableness, such as we expect from an hon. Member from Yorkshire, many points, and suddenly heard him say, in a different tone, almost exactly the same scare-raising, hair-raising things about the state of the public health which were earlier said, totally unreasonably, by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). That worries me. He must not make unsubstantiated assertions about threats of increased infection and outbreaks of food poisoning without quantifying the increase and giving the House evidence.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I accept what the Minister says. There is a danger that statistics are self-fulfilling. When the press becomes interested in an outbreak of salmonella poisoning, other outbreaks suddenly become public property. I accept that danger. However, I would expect him to be desperately worried about other aspects of public health which are not on the agenda, but which I would have expected to see there. In Bradford people are extremely worried about the incidence of dysentry—and not people who are prone to lay such things at the feet of our immigrant populations. The outbreak is mainly concentrated in old council estates on the periphery of the city. I would have hoped that the Minister would be worried about that.

The general problem is immense. Resources for health services will never match expectations, as the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) continually tells the House. When a particular treatment or skill is known to be possible, everyone expects it to be generally available. Clearly, that demand cannot be met. In a sense the more glamorous a specialty the less is its impact on health care. The more expensive an individual treatment or individual technology is, the more difficult it is to make it generally available. We shy away from the fundamental problem of questioning clinical freedom. We avoid developing better evaluation of treatment and medical audit. At present the inhibition on clinical freedom is the waiting list, but we passively allow that to continue. It is time we examined ways and means of tackling the mismatch of expectations and resources for services.

It is sad for the NHS that the case against the Government's failure to tackle such matters is so badly handled by the Labour Opposition. The Government are let off the hook time and time again by the Labour party's obsession with antique clichés and, even worse, by its acceptance of the Government's terms of debate. A different agenda for debates on health matters is needed in the House. There is a crisis in the NHS and in social services. It is sad that neither the Government nor the Opposition Benches are aware of the fact that a new agenda is required, and that they cannot deal with it.

5.9 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Ward) said about the Warnock committee report. I hope that the House will have an opportunity to debate the problems outlined in the report, preferably before the Government

have made up their mind as to what they want to do. I hope that Ministers will ensure that, whatever comes before the House, hon. Members will have a free vote.

I wish first to discuss the annual report on "The Health Service in England", which came out recently. The NHS is the jewel in the crown of the DHSS, and its successes between 1978 and 1983, which were outlined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, are worth hammering home. Inpatient treatments have increased by 648,000 a year, and outpatient attendances have increased by 2·5 million a year. Both have shown an increase about three times higher than under the Labour Government. There has been an increase of 19 per cent. in cases per available bed for inpatients, and day cases have increased by a further 250,000.

The National Health Service is rapidly becoming the largest employer in western Europe, certainly in terms of the numbers on its books. It is the right sort of employment for the services that it is intended to provide: consultant staffing has increased by 13 per cent.; district-nurse staffing has increased by 15 per cent.; nurse and midwife staffing generally has increased by 13 per cent.; and general practitioners and dentists have increased by 12 per cent. At the same time, the average doctor's list has decreased by 9 per cent., so that our family doctors have far more time to talk to us. Under the Conservative Government, full-time staff has increased by 60,000. There has been a reduction in ancillary staff, but 46,000 of those extra 60,000 are nurses and midwives. The Government should be immensely proud of that record.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short), who has left the Chamber, talked about the terrible state of some hospitals. She should be aware that the capital programme is now 23 per cent. higher in real terms than it was under the Labour Government. Therefore, to answer the question about who is replacing our tatty old hospitals, we are, and we are doing it much faster than the Labour Government did when they had the opportunity.

The annual report shows some of the perils of throwing money at a problem and keeping one's fingers crossed. The 17 per cent. additional money over and above inflation that the Government have provided to the NHS has resulted in people throughout the country scratching their heads and asking, "Where has all the money gone?". I include among them many of the administrators responsible for the Health Service.

It is worth exploring the point in a little detail. Half of the 17 per cent. went on pay rises and the reduction in the average working week of a nurse. That is an improvement in service, whatever the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) might say, because there used to be an astonishingly high turnover in trained nurses. It used to be impossible to fill posts for trained nurses, and that still happens in specialty areas such as sick children's nursing. I commend to Ministers the possibility of extending special allowances, which are currently available for geriatric and psychiatric nursing, to other sorts of nursing to attract staff to those areas.

Half of what was left after the pay rises went on non-pay rises for NHS drugs and equipment. One would have thought that, with the purchasing power of the NHS being what it is, the NHS retail price index would be lower than the national retail price index, not several percentage points higher. That problem must be tackled and solved to the benefit of the Health Service and us all.

Part of the 17 per cent. went on the 1 to 1·5 per cent. demographic change—mainly the increased number of old people. I must tell Labour Members that that increased money was made available and that it became possible to maintain the same level of health services to the increased number of old people who presented themselves for care and treatment, many of them over and over again—and why not? An elderly person costs the Health Service nine times as much as a young person, and the Government have managed to maintain services. Indeed, there is even something left over from the 17 per cent.

I congratulate Ministers on that achievement. If the Labour Government had produced such a record on the Health Service, Labour Members would be shouting it from the rooftops. I remember only too well when I was a member of a health authority when Labour representatives were in charge that it was extremely difficult to get staff, our capital programmes vanished into thin air, and waiting lists became longer. I feel sorry for the hon. Member for Oldham, West, who has a difficult job in blabbing on about cuts when there are none.

While speaking about the social security budget of £39 billion, I shall mention a point that has been only briefly discussed hitherto, and that is pensions and pensioners. In 1982-83, total expenditure on contributory retirement pensions was about 13·5 billion, which represented 70 per cent. of the outgoings of the national insurance fund and nearly half of all social security benefits, excluding rent rebates and allowances. If we add to that the £1·4 billion spent in that year on supplementary pensions and the £40 million, which in that context was peanuts, for the over-80s who did not have a record of contributions, we discover that pensions represent one of the largest budgets in all public spending.

About 10 million people receive state retirement pensions, and for about half of them state benefits account for three quarters or more of their total incomes. Therefore, we are talking about an important part of the national economy. We have been told that the gap between pensioners and others is widening. It is worth recognising the promises that were made some years ago:

> "Pensioners . . . can confidently look forward to sharing in the increased standards of living of the country as a whole."—[*Official Report*, 13 June 1979; Vol. 968, c. 439.]

It will be difficult to fulfil that promise.

The present commitment is that pensions should be uprated in line with the retail price index. However, the working population is busy uprating itself way above the retail price index, as average earnings are soaring. That means that the gap between workers and the retired begins to widen, and it means especially that the expectations of those who retired, in relation to what they might have been earning had they still been in work, will be challenged.

That is in contradiction to recent history. The report, "Population, Pensions Costs and Pensioners' Incomes", which was published recently, stated that the basic pension, as a percentage of average net earnings for a male manual worker between 1951, when it was 30 per cent., and 1981-82, when it was 50 per cent., has been increasing steadily in the post-war period. We have raised expectations that pensions will continue to increase as a proportion of earnings, and those expectations may be difficult to challenge. The explanation will need careful presentation.

We should also recognise that, despite the increased number of pensioners, the share of personal disposable

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

income that has gone to pensioners during roughly the same period has increased much faster. We have been allocating a larger and larger proportion of our national income to pensions, and perhaps we should consider whether more of that money should go to the economy, training or education. We must find the right balance.

The objective of all Government policy towards pensions——

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Before the hon. Lady leaves her point about the need to consider the commitments that we have made to pensioners, I should tell her that that commitment is enshrined in legislation. The Social Security Act 1975 contained a commitment to move pensioners' incomes closer to average earnings over a period of time. Is she suggesting that we should scrap the Act and tear up our agreement with pensioners, and therefore widen the gap between the earnings of pensioners and those of the rest of the community?

Mrs. Currie: No. As my pension date is getting closer, as it is for all of us, I hope that when I reach that stage my pension will be not 50 per cent. but a higher proportion of average earnings. I merely point out that such commitments are expensive and that we should be aware of what is happening in the national economy when we make them. I do not wish to trade party points with the distinguished hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), but I recall that the 1983 Labour party manifesto stated that that commitment would be carried out "as soon as practicable."

The objective of all Government policy has been to provide adequate pensions on the basis that the old should not live in poverty. That policy has been set by all Governments, and the whole House endorses it. There has been much legislation, especially the 1975 Act, and the Government Actuary's report this year showed alarmingly how difficult and expensive it would be if the state alone had to provide those adequate pensions. Many Governments — certainly this Government — have developed a secondary objective, which is to try to spread the burden and to add more legs to the stool so that it does not eventually topple over. Therefore, we should welcome the review of pensions, and the reviews of other benefits that are under way. We should commend Ministers for the astonishing amount of effort and number of hours that they have put into ensuring that those reviews are doing their job. We have what must be the best-informed Front Bench on this difficult and complex subject that has ever been seen in the House. I compliment my colleagues on that.

In the opinion of many, Beveridge fails, and is likely to fail, to satisfy the demand, so we should turn to the private sector. One of the most interesting items in the debate recently has been the Centre for Policy Studies report, which came out in 1983. It said many things, but picked up two facets likely to be the subject of legislation —if not in this Session, in the next one—and one was mentioned in the Gracious Speech. One subject is early leavers and the other is portable pensions.

I share the objectives of encouraging mobility and a widening of choice. It must be possible for the best people to move around and to take their pension rights, if not their actual pensions, with them. Between 1969 and 1975, when the last legislation on this subject was introduced, I had four different jobs. Three of them were pensionable, and I lost every penny that I had put into those pension schemes. I am never likely to see my money again. I resent that. It did not make much difference at the time, but in years to come I may wish that I had that money.

I see the objectives of the report as possibly conflicting with the original objective of avoiding poverty. If we get away from the compulsory nature of most company pension schemes and the Government scheme, I fear that we may end up with smaller private pensions, and eventually with a bigger burden on the state.

The Government Actuary estimates that there are 90,000 occupational pension schemes, of which about 79,000 have fewer than 30 members. We are talking about huge sums of money and a wide diversity of schemes, few of which are properly regulated.

One of the most interesting documents around is the National Association of Pensions Funds' survey of occupational pensions for 1983. It looked at 1,100 schemes, which covered £75 billion worth of funds by market value. It found that the total contributions to those schemes was £7·25 billion a year. The outlay on occupational pensions in lump sums was £4·75 billion a year and the pension outlay alone for those schemes has been rising extremely fast. Between 1982-83, it rose by 15 per cent. to £2·75 billion a year. In other words, on the occupational pensions side we are talking about a huge part of the economy. It is estimated that, in total, about £100 billion is involved, which works out at an average of £18,000 per employee—far more in many cases than people have in any other form of wealth.

It is not just the economic and social aspects of all this that concern me. We have to be sure that we change company law to protect the people involved. That is mentioned in the Gracious Speech, where it says:

"to ensure that members are able to obtain information about their schemes."

I have tried ploughing through the accounting standards committee of the Institute of Chartered Accountants exposure draft 34, "Pension Schemes Accounts", and, having read it once, I am heartily glad that I decided not to be an accountant. However, we should welcome the interest of the accounting profession in getting company law right on this. No company is obliged to have a pension scheme and, if it does, few rules are in force.

Most pension schemes are trusts, but they do not have to be, and it is possible for a man to pay into a scheme for 20 years and not get a penny. This has happened to some of my constituents. It happens, for example, when a pensions fund is not kept separate from the accounts of the company and is drawn on as an asset of the firm. It happens particularly if a pension fund invests heavily in shares that go bust, even if it invests in the shares of its own company. If that company goes bankrupt, on the day that people go for their redundancy pay, they find that they do not have a pension. We must do something about that. There is a temptation, even for a good company, to go raiding a pension fund. Most countries raid their own pension funds, and we certainly do.

There is no clear statement of liability to pensions on the balance sheet, and when a company is taken over the purchasing company may not have the foggiest idea what liabilities it is taking on, partly because the original company may not even know. The accounts of a pension fund do not have to be audited or checked by an actuary. Even if the fund is run by a trust, there is no statutory

requirement on the trust at present to publish, or even to prepare, a report for the employees—the contributors—nor even for the trustees themselves.

There is a temptation, where that liability is known, to reduce the liability. For example, when British Airways recently offered an average of £6,000 per employee to encourage employees to change over to a less generous pension scheme, and to reduce their pension rights, I understand that 17,000 out of 26,000 eligible people took the money and reduced their pension rights. I think that they were mad to do that, and the day will come when they will rue it.

The accounting profession is concentrating its efforts on disclosure policy, but I have a feeling that that is rather akin to choosing what colour to paint the stable door. My concern is that, when my constituents retire and go to open the stable door, they should find a serviceable horse inside and not an unpleasant, smelly mess that somebody else will have to clear up.

The real problem is that we do not take pensions seriously enough. My generation could not care less, but it should, because it has to pay not only for its own future pensions but for the current pensions on the "pay-as-you-go" scheme. We do not realise how much pensions cost. Recently, the House voted to increase our pension contribution from 6 per cent. to 9 per cent. The policemen here in Westminster pay 11 per cent. for their pension, and one of the propositions on the table for the police is that that should go up to 14 per cent. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who I think is about my age, would, if he were providing his pension entirely as a self-employed person, have to fork out 23 per cent. of his earnings. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who is a little older than us both, would have to fork out 38 per cent. of his salary if he were having to provide for his pension himself.

Just for the Government schemes alone, employers and employees are forking out 18 per cent. of current earnings to the national insurance fund, and that is set to rise to 20 per cent. and higher. This is what bothers me. If we allow free choice, without minimum standards, then there are strong odds that the young and the middle-aged will not pay. They will make a conscious, or even sub-conscious, calculation of what the risks are to them of needing that pension or that survivor's pension soon. While the risks are low, the incentive will be low. At that age, the pressures of mortgages, cars, children and everything else will tend to take priority.

My most acute concern is for survivors of pension schemes. Typically, a good pension scheme provides two thirds of final salary for the pension contributor, but only 50 per cent. for the survivor, and in many cases survivors are not mentioned. Most of the elderly are women and most old women are widows, and many widows live in poverty. Even with an occupational pension from a company that is regarded as generous, there are occupational pension widows in my constituency who are having to rely on supplementary benefit to top up their pension to a reasonable standard.

If we are arguing for equality, we could say that women should do this themselves, but women find it much harder to provide for their own pensions. They have a shorter working life, not just because of the earlier retirement age, but because of time off for children. They are more likely to work part time and they are more likely to have low pay —the figure is about 75 per cent. of male pay. They are more often given exemptions from superannuation, or they may find that they are not entitled to it.

Even where women pay the contributions, there is discouragement and they tend to lose out. A lady in her sixties in my constituency has been claiming £17 a week on her own contributions. Then her husband died and she started to receive the £47 a week widow's allowance on his contributions, so her £17 was stopped. If ever there was a discouragement to women to demand better rights and pay for them, that must be it. In the private scheme survey by the National Association of Pension Funds only just over half provided any pension at all to a dependent widower. So perhaps my male colleagues should be more worried about what may happen to them than I am about what may happen to the ladies.

I support the philosophy behind the CPS report. But unless the Government set clear enforceable minimum standards, we are heading for trouble. If we give people enough choice, I am afraid that they will choose not to fork out enough. If we give them enough mobility, they will move away from a realistic and knowledgeable assessment of what their expectations will cost in today's hard money. It is they and their survivors who will suffer and, most of all, their children and grandchildren who will be paying out in tax to keep their elders who should have known better but did not.

I am glad to support the Government and I shall watch developments with interest.

5.30 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): I listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie). The energy and enthusiasm that she put into her speech were remarkable. I am sure that she has earned the right to sit down because she must be completely exhausted.

At the beginning of her speech the hon. Lady produced a mass of statistics. Unfortunately, in my constituency pensioners do not live on statistics. They do not sit down to a plate of fish and statistics. Nurses do not go out to buy their shoes with statistics. It is cash that counts. The message that she was trying to put across at the beginning of her speech would not go down well with the ordinary people in my area.

I want to speak today on education rather than social services. One sentence on the last page in the Queen's Speech covers a multitude of sins or a multitude of valuable prospects for the education service. It says:

"My Government will continue to develop policies to raise educational standards."

It could be argued that that is a beginning rather than a continuation. That is the theory that has been put forward. The question arises on the practice. The Secretary of State for Education and Science was here a few seconds ago but he has just disappeared. He regularly makes pronouncements in the House and elsewhere about the need for innovation in educational standards. He is noted for his dreams. However, his achievements to date need some examination.

I am constantly reminded by educationists from the north of England of the right hon. Gentleman's address to the north of England education conference in January. He set some commendable objectives. According to the press notice issued by the Department, he set out

"to define the objective of the main parts of the 5 to 16 curriculum so that everyone knows the level of attainment that should be

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achieved at various stages by pupils of different abilities; to alter the 16-plus examinations so that they measure absolute, rather than relative, performance; to establish, as a realistic objective, the aim of bringing 80-90 per cent. of all pupils at least to the level which is now expected and achieved in the 16-plus examinations by pupils of average ability in individual subjects; and to do so over a broad range of skills and competence in a number of subjects. Sir Keith said 'This is the objective which the Government now wishes to set itself and its partners in the education service in England and Wales.'"

I am certain that the right hon. Gentleman's partners would wish to consider his proposals and would probably, in the main, agree with his targets. But there is a major flaw in the progression of those aims. His partners, the local education authorities, are all suffering in various degrees from the reduction in expenditure demanded by the Government. I speak as a county councillor for 11 years, a chairman of school governors, a member of two other boards of school governors, the member of a board of governors of a technical college and with two years' experience as leader of a county council. Early on in my involvement in the education committee of my local authority I was reminded during discussions on priorities in education of a comment by one of my more elderly colleagues. He said that a teacher could teach a large class in a meadow without resources and would achieve a limited success. There would be an improvement by the provision of adequate resources and a greater improvement if teachers and pupils had a suitable building with adequate support facilities. That clearly illustrates the basic priorities. Teachers should be adequately trained with a good in-service training. There should be full and proper resources with suitable buildings, properly maintained and cleaned.

What is the reality? That is not the reality in my county which has poor in-service training, a serious lack of resources and in many cases unsuitable buildings, badly maintained and with inadequate support. That also seems to be the case in other shire counties. Therefore, the foundation upon which the Secretary of State wishes to build is crumbling.

Northumberland, the northernmost county in England, like other shire counties, has to provide almost 60 per cent. of its budget for education purposes. In that county that is £65 million out of £113 million in the current year. The penalising legislation introduced in recent years has caused serious problems for the county although there have been constant efforts to protect the education service against the worst effects of the reductions. Other services have had to pay the price.

Those difficulties were aggravated by 14 years of local Tory control, which produced poor pupil-teacher ratios and poor school buildings, built on the cheap and now causing expensive maintenance problems. In the past two years a high school, built in the 1960s, had part of its flat roof blown off in a high wind. The cost of replacing that roof was nearly £200,000—money that could have been usefully spent in other areas of the education service. Almost £250,000 was wasted on providing a new roof because of the cheap building system that had been used.

Betwen 1979 and 1981-82 the per capita allowances diminished in real terms by 32 per cent. in my county. That was before Labour took control in 1981. One of my last acts as leader of the council was to establish special funding on a one-off basis to attempt to restore the necessary standard of service required in both resources and building. That action proved to be of great benefit but it probably will not be continued because it was on a one-off basis.

In the budget for 1979-80, £835,000 was provided which was not even considered to be adequate. In 1980-81, still under Conservative control, that was reduced to £735,000—a 12 per cent. drop. In ensuing years inflation has been added to that base figure of £735,000 to bring the total in 1984-85 to £1,361,150. Thus, in reality, £750,000 has been taken out of the repairs and maintenance element of my authority's responsibilities for education and buildings.

The special funding arrangements introduced by the Labour-controlled authority in 1983-84 and 1984-85 restored £650,000. But the lack of repair and maintenance during the 14 to 15 years of Conservative control will still cause significant problems. Of even greater importance is the pressure on high schools as a result of the teacher-pupil ratios. Proper curriculum development is difficult. Indeed, I must compliment the administration in my county, the teachers and the heads, on the efforts that they are making to protect the students from the worst ravages of staff reductions. In addition, there is a serious lack of proper remedial teaching and that is causing problems throughout the service, from the five-year-olds beginning school to those aged 16 and over.

In one of the primary schools in my constituency, of which I am proud to be a governor, there is a class of 32 children. Five of them have speech problems but, because of the lack of specialist resources, there is little opportunity to assist them during their early years in school. That will be a continuing problem for them throughout their school careers. One young girl had hearing and sight difficulties identified when she was in the reception class. She was under five years of age at the time. Six years later there was a response to her needs and she is now receiving treatment. Indeed, she has moved up from the first to the middle school. But when she was between five and nine years of age appropriate consideration was not given to her problems.

The concern felt by many in the county is reflected in the attempt earlier this year by representatives of the high school governors to meet the Secretary of State for Education and Science. He refused their application to see him, claiming that he was too busy. I understand that attempts are now being made by the governors of the middle school to arrange a meeting with all the middle school governors in the county, and to try to persuade the Secretary of State to meet them as well.

Recently I received a letter from a fellow chairman of middle school governors who comes from a more rural part of the county. He claimed to be speaking for his governors following a governors' meeting and said:

"We spend time each year listing items for repair in order of urgency, but knowing there is little chance of most of these items being dealt with. The fabric of our school is deteriorating."

He went on to say that the governors deplored the low capitation allowance that deprived children of necessary equipment, books and so on. He said:

"We see our PTA being asked and expected to increasingly provide equipment that many would regard as essential. In the long term we see the danger that this will lead to inequalities between schools in poor, as opposed to wealthy areas."

I should add that this weekend I shall be attending a PTA function to raise funds to provide essential facilities in the school. I am happy to do so but am sorry that it is necessary.

The governors see evidence of teachers staying in post rather than moving to gain experience and promotion, as job prospects are blocked by those who are reluctant to leave work temporarily because they may find themselves unable to find employment again later. The comments of that board of governors, through its chairman, confirm my recent impressions. During the recess I spent half of my time visiting schools in my constituency. There is a three-tier system in the area but in every school similar comments were made. As I had the time available, I was able to discuss the situation in detail with the staff and the heads. I received the same message as I heard from the chairman of that middle school in Northumberland. Among the staff and the heads there is an overriding feeling that morale is not as high as it should be. Teaching is becoming more and more difficult. If teachers could leave the profession for other jobs, I should imagine that quite a few of them would do so. Obviously, however, that is not possible in the present employment situation.

The falling rolls in Northumberland are broadly in line with the national average but there is one significant difference. The number of pupils is falling quite dramatically in rural areas but is increasing in urban areas. Consequently, there are half-empty schools in the rural areas and overcrowded schools in the urban areas. In the west and north of the county the school population is diminishing but in the south-east it is increasing. But the Government do not take that problem into account in the funding arrangements.

Another problem facing our county, and other counties with rural areas, is school transport. We spend almost 16 per cent. of the budget on transporting children round the county, taking them to and from school. That is a very heavy burden for a small authority such as ours. At present, the authority is trying to establish its budget for 1984-85 and is suggesting—I doubt whether with any success—a standstill budget for the third or fourth time. If that is agreed, it will take the authority £8 million above the Government target and about £17 million into penalty. That means that the authority will be severely penalised. However, if it decides to reduce the services that are already skinned to the bone, particularly in education, those services will be approaching a standard that is unacceptable in terms of the requirements of the Department of Education and Science and its inspectors.

The Secretary of State has not yet returned to the Chamber, but his pious dreams—albeit I support the principles outlined in his speech—cannot be superimposed upon the nightmare position of education in my county. One question that must always be raised concerns the Secretary of State's power of persuasion within the Cabinet and Treasury. He does not seem to have as much clout as some of his colleagues. But it should be remembered that the education service forms the basis for the future. One can talk about the social services—and I very much support the arguments for that service—and the economy, but the future lies in our education service. Education starts with the under-fives and ends at the 16-plus point. Indeed, it never really finishes. However, we must provide the resources and facilities to ensure that education, and with it the future, is protected as much as possible in present economic conditions.

5.47 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me, as London Members of Parliament face some difficulty in trying to cope with a lobby and at the same time take part in this important debate. I was very interested in the speech of the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson), which concentrated on the important subject of education. I intend to speak on the same subject, but first I should point out that I am sorry that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is not in his seat. He admitted that the Labour party has instituted a witch hunt requiring Socialists on health authorities to identify themselves and their allies. He made extraordinary accusations against the Government that are totally unsupportable.

If the hon. Gentleman had had the courage to give way to me, which he did not, I would have told him to go and have a look at some Labour-controlled education authorities that are appointing Socialist headmasters in a corrupt way, and have been doing so for a long time.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): Name them.

Mr. Greenway: They are in parts of London and Wales. I shall give some specific examples——

Mr. Boyes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to accuse elected representatives, like us, of being corrupt? Should not the hon. Gentleman be forced to withdraw that remark, as it is a slur on councillors throughout the length and breadth of Britain?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): I did not hear the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) say that about another hon. Member. But if he did, I am sure that he would want to rephrase his remarks.

Mr. Greenway: I simply referred to what another hon. Member said and replied to his argument. I am not surprised that hon. Members do not like it, but it is about time that Labour Members faced up to Labour tactics in local government and did something about it.

Mr. John Patten: Does my hon. Friend agree that it should be a cause at least for some discussion when one Labour-controlled borough in London appoints as its new director of social services the chairman of the social services committee of another Labour-controlled borough?

Mr. Boyes: What is corrupt about that?

Mr. Greenway: I agree with my hon. Friend. The GLC appointments need looking at. The chairman of the London area enterprise board was the leader of the Labour group in Wandsworth. I put it no stronger, but the matter needs attention.

Mr. Frank Field: I cannot quite understand the hon. Gentleman's argument. Is he saying that our accusation against the Government over reappointing Conservative sympathisers to health authorities is justified because authorities in London and Wales appoint people to positions in schools even though they are not the most appropriate? Is he saying that one wrong justifies another or does he condemn both practices?

Mr. Greenway: I have too great a personal regard for the hon. Gentleman to break our friendship on that argument. It is unworthy of him. Labour's witch hunt of the health councils is unjustified and it is paralleled by

[Mr. Greenway]

Labour appointments in schools and local authorities. The position is unsatisfactory and needs to be examined. It is as bad, disgraceful and corrupt as it is to support violence against the police. The situation is in that category and Labour must pull itself together.

We had an interesting debate on higher education recently. The Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), when challenged by me, was not able to say that if a Labour Government were returned they would restore cuts in higher education spending.

The hon. Member for Wansbeck spoke of the Secretary of State in mixed terms. He spoke as an administrator rather than a practitioner. I do not mean that in a denigratory sense. The present Secretary of State has brought to education a quality of thought and stimulus of action which was matched by few of his predecessors. Everyone in education agrees with that. My right hon. Friend's particular concern is for the bottom 40 per cent., the deal for the underdog in schools. That is the type of child in whom I am especially interested; he or she is forgotten, ignored or kicked around. The quality of thought and stimulus that the Secretary of State has brought to such children's curricula is more than commendable.

The Secretary of State has initiated examination reform that has been overdue for tens of years. The 16-plus examination system is based on a format that is full of faults and that was established in 1917. This Secretary of State is the first to tackle the problem. That is a criticism of those who came before him. He is tackling the problem in a far-sighted and useful way.

Today the pupil-teacher ratio in schools is better than ever. Do the Opposition want resources to be spent on more and more teachers or do they think that there should be a mix of more teachers and other things? When I challenged an Opposition spokesman recently to say what he thought was the ideal pupil-teacher ratio he said that he did not know but that it should be better. That is an example of the fatuously thin thinking on the Opposition Front Bench.

Corporal punishment is mentioned in the Queen's Speech. It is no use trying to tackle behaviour problems in schools without doing something about religious and moral education. Children need to know the difference between right and wrong and they learn that best through religious and moral education.

In two thirds of primary schools teachers handling religious education are too confused to cope. Children are not taught the subject properly. In a quarter of secondary schools no religious or moral education takes place beyond the age of 14 or the third year. That is desperately unsatisfactory. Behaviour in schools and everywhere else is governed by individual self-discipline and by accepting moral standards. For me those are Christian standards, but each person comes to his own morality through his own religion.

Mr. Frank Field: The House will agree that we need to pay more attention to how children acquire moral standards. If the Government hold that view, is it not unsatisfactory that they should have disproportionately cut teacher training places at church colleges compared with other colleges?

Mr. Greenway: I do not want any cut in religious education training places. I hope that Ministers will consider a programme for religious education teachers similar to that used to produce more and better maths teachers. Both the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary are extremely keen on religious education.

I am worried about the proposed Bill to deal with corporal punishment in schools. There are two levels of discussion on that important question. I do not say this in a party sense, but the Labour party's position is similar to that of the Society of Teachers Opposed to Physical Punishment. The Swedish attitude also is idealistic. The Labour party takes the naive view that all children are basically good and that punishment is therefore irrelevant and unnecessary. That is a dangerous approach. The Opposition say that it is wrong to use force to bend children to one's will. That may be right but they hold the view idealistically. There are times when even the most mild and idealistic parent uses force to bend a child to his or her will.

The Labour party and Swedish-type thinking supports the Rousseau approach, as in "Emile", that children are basically good, that they can be handled through their self-motivation and that their self-motivation can be related to their discipline. That is an intellectually interesting view, but we must move to the other level—the practical level of how children are, particularly in schools.

Thomas Arnold, a headmaster of the great Rugby school—similar to the public school attended by the hon. Member for Durham, North—once said:

> "My aim is to produce Christian gentlemen; Christian boys I can scarcely hope to make."

He put his finger on the matter.

The practical approach to discipline cannot be intellectual. Corporal punishment is not a cure for bad behaviour, but it can be a deterrent. The cane should be used sparingly until it eventually eliminates itself; it should not be eliminated by an Act of Parliament. It should be used only by the headmaster and his deputy. It can be effective, although it should be used only for major offences such as serious bullying. I once saw boys of 19 taking money from boys of 11. They made them jump in the air so that any money in their pockets would jingle. Such behaviour is quite unacceptable and must be handled firmly. In such a case corporal punishment is not out of place. Of course, I accept that one cannot use corporal punishment on youths of 19, but it can certainly be used on younger children.

Cases of vandalism could also be handled by corporal punishment. The children involved should be made to repair any damage. I am not, of course, suggesting that girls should be subjected to corporal punishment.

The Opposition must accept that there is tremendous teacher and parental support for corporal punishment. Happily, severe beatings are a thing of the past. There is no longer the appalling brutality about which children have written when they became adults. The essential point about discipline in schools is that there must be equal treatment for all children. The Bill will create unequal treatment. Some parents will not allow corporal punishment for their children while other parents will accept it. Corporal punishment should be immediate and never malicious.

What are the alternatives? Will there be "sin bins" with children driven off in shame? Will they be given lines or additional mathematics? What would that do to a child's

attitude towards mathematics? Will they be sent on runs? Will teachers use sarcasm? The lash of the tongue is more wicked than a reasonable lash of the cane. Bitter sarcasm destroys the mind — yet is not the mind a central responsibility for teachers? Is shouting at a child an alternative? Is suspension and expulsion? What happens to a child if he is expelled? That boy is the very boy who needs to be in school. What will he do if he is not in school?

If a pupil refuses all the alternative punishments that I have outlined, what is to happen then? There must be an end to the road. Should that child be referred to the juvenile courts? What will that do to him? An hon. Friend recently told me about a child who had been referred to a juvenile court because he had stolen 10p. A short wigging or a tap could have sorted out the problem. That child had to suffer appearing in a court — and that procedure was established by the Labour party. It is no good the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) smiling. She must know that it is part of the Children and Young Persons Act 1969. Should the children be referred to a psychiatrist or to the psychological service? We must avoid that where we can for we would needlessly be making "cases" of them.

Headmasters and teachers must continue to stand in loco parentis. They must control discipline in schools within the guidelines laid down. Two systems of discipline cannot be applied in one school, as that would be a departure from the vital principle of equal treatment. The only way out is for parents to be asked to accept a discipline code before their children enter a school. Perhaps areas should have some schools that use corporal punishment and some that do not. Parents could then choose to which schools they would send their children.

Parents cannot judge or run school discipline from outside the school. Headmasters and teachers must handle discipline immediately, on the spot and with equal treatment for all children. I am concerned that the Bill may not allow that. I shall wait to see what my right hon. Friend produces in the Bill. In the meantime, I ask him to take account of the points that I have raised.

6.6 pm

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) will not expect me to follow him on the subject of education. He will know that I wish to talk about the National Health Service. I listened to the hon. Gentleman with interest. I knew that he would get to Tom Brown's schooldays eventually, and he did. The hon. Gentleman's opening remarks tempt me to speak about political appointments in the Health Service and about the six regional health authority chairmen who were sacked and the six political appointees who took their places.

This is a mishmash of a debate, and I blame the usual channels for that. All Health Service debates are a bit of a mess, although not as bad as foreign affairs debates. The two important matters of the Health Service and social security always mean a mixed debate, but today's debate is rather like Gaul, in three parts, because we have the Health Service, social security and education.

A number of hon. Members have said that the National Health Service was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech. I have been a Member of the House for 25 years and have spoken in every debate on the Queen's Speech. I must be conservative in my old age for I speak on the same subject as always, the NHS. This is the first time that I can recall there being no mention of the NHS in the Queen's Speech. There has been a little compensation in that the Secretary of State has shared his thoughts with the House, although he missed some important points.

I believe that three pieces of legislation should have been included in the programme for this Session. Many statistics have been presented to the House throughout the debate so far. The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) presented us with a good many. We keep on proving that we have a marvellous illness service. It is suggested that the NHS becomes better the more people it treats. That approach might be all right for industrial production, but it is not for the Health Service. The NHS has existed since 1948. We are all aware of demographic problems—and aging population—and the demands that these factors make on the service. However, the greatest gap in the Gracious Speech is a reference to the need to make inroads in prevention.

I should like the Government to introduce a Bill designed to prevent or reduce chest diseases. Secondly, I should like them to introduce a Bill designed to prevent or reduce dental caries. Thirdly, they should introduce a Bill to prevent excess profits in the drug industry. Such a measure would release considerable resources, which the NHS so badly needs.

When it comes to patients versus profits, the Government are always reduced to being a puppet. That has been evident in the Government's agreements with the tobacco-producing industry since they took office in 1979. It is common knowledge that the greatest single step in the prevention of chest diseases would be to stop the smoking of cigarettes. About 100,000 premature deaths—deaths between the ages of 45 and 65 years—could be avoided annually if the Government would act to prevent the smoking holocaust. As the Secretary of State for Education and Science is to reply on behalf of the Government, I shall not have many of my questions on health answered this evening. However, I am grateful to see the Minister for Health in his place. I am certain that he will write to me in response to the questions that I shall ask. He always does.

First, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that there are 100,000 premature deaths annually of those aged between 45 and 65 years? That is the figure that is referred to by the Royal College of Physicians and the British Medical Association. The most recent Government figure was given by the Prime Minister in 1980 when she spoke of 50,000 premature deaths—still too many — through the smoking of cigarettes. It is inevitable that the debate on premature deaths through smoking will continue and it will be helpful to have the Government's official figure.

Last year there were fewer than 5,000 deaths through road accidents in England and Wales. The Secretary of State for Social Services has come under pressure from hon. Members on both sides of the House because of their great concern about drug abuse and the increase in the use of heroin. It was thought that drug abuse was peaking 15 years ago. There was a trough in the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, but there is now an increase in deaths as a result of drug abuse, including the use of hard drugs. Incidentally, I do not know why the Secretary of State never takes action on amphetamines. It is about time

[Mr. Laurie Pavitt]

that their part in the escalation was recognised. Despite increasing drug abuse, the number of deaths recorded last year as a result of the abuse was fewer than 3,000.

I commend the campaign that is designed to reduce or eradicate drug abuse, but if we can take that problem on our shoulders, which resulted last year in fewer than 3,000 deaths, we should surely be doing something to overcome cigarette addiction, which is causing about 100,000 premature deaths each year. Surely the weight of evidence demands that much higher priority should be given to the prevention of chest and heart diseases.

The House will recall that about 20 years ago Sir George Godber, the then chief medical officer of health, made a statement which was followed up by the World Health Organisation two years later. Sir George said that the greatest single step to preventing illness and overcoming the need for treatment would be to do something about cigarette smoking.

Since 1961 the main protagonist in this debate has been the Royal College of Physicians. At the BMA's conference last year the 600 delegates, representing the entire medical profession, carried nem con a motion that the Government must listen to medical opinion and cease to be the puppet of the tobacco industry. Dr. John Harvard, the secretary of the BMA, said:

"The tobacco industry spends millions of pounds employing advertising, public relations and promotional experts to help them promote a product we know—and they should know—is directly responsible for disease, illness and death. Advertising, sports and arts sponsorship, competitions, clothes bearing brand names and holidays are all part of the industry's attempt to fool their customers into believing that smoking is glamorous, healthy and desirable. These same consumers are our patients, and we know the truth—that smoking causes appalling illness and so many unnecessary deaths that the figure of 100,000 premature deaths each year is beyond comprehension."

The head of the BMA's professional division, Dr. John Dawson, has stated:

"We all know tobacco is a killer. Doctors know it, the public knows it and the tobacco industry ought to know it. Year after year, doctors at the BMA's Annual Representative Meeting have called for legal controls, but instead we have voluntary agreements, cosily agreed between successive Governments and the manufacturers. These agreements—as you can see—are a sick joke."

I have three questions for the Minister. First, will he and representatives of his Department meet the BMA to discuss in what way the Government can take action to prevent the holocaust?

Mr. John Patten: We met the BMA on Monday to discuss the issue that the hon. Gentleman is raising.

Mr. Pavitt: I am grateful for that. I hope that there will be a continuing dialogue. It is important that the BMA's campaign, which is to be accelerated, should be well in tune with what the Government are doing. The Government should respond to what the BMA is trying to do.

Secondly, will the Department use its influence to provide time for a private Member's Bill aimed at reducing the smoking of cigarettes if the Government are not prepared to introduce such legislation themselves? In 1980, the previous Secretary of State for Social Services, now the Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Jenkin), said that he felt it was time, although the Government did not wish to introduce legislation, that the House of Commons, without the Whips, should come to its own conclusion on this issue. Indeed, the Whips did not intervene when subsequently two Bills were introduced by me, which were intended to deal with the cigarette-smoking problem. It seems that the Government have changed their policy since then, so I ask the Minister whether the Government are prepared to provide time for a private Member's Bill — it would have all-party support — to deal with the problem. I hope that the Minister will give an assurance that, if such a Bill were introduced, the Government would give it time and allow the House of Commons to make its own decision.

There is soon to be a statement on economics and finance. Against that background, will the Minister discuss with his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer the possibility of avoiding the problems that sport and the arts would face if the promotional activity of the tobacco industry is, as I hope, stopped? If taxation on a packet of cigarettes were to be increased by one tenth of a penny, an additional £6 million would be raised. That is the sum that the industry is spending to sponsor snooker, other sports and the arts, for example.

The Government are being made to look foolish. They are not prepared to accept the advertising of cigarettes on television, yet tobacco companies are using hundreds of millions of pounds of television advertising. We need legislation, not the customary agreements.

Information about another preventive measure was leaked, but the programme did not arrive. About £500 million a year is spent on dental services and there are about 250 million items of dental service. That is happening when the disease of dental caries is preventable. I hope that the Government will take their courage in their hands and bring forward a Bill to get rid of the muddle about fluoridation of water supplies. The Conservatives know that, under Prime Minister Macmillan, there were three years of intensive research into fluoridation, culminating in 1961. The resulting evidence shows that if fluoride were added to water in the proportion of 10:1,000,000 the spectrum of dental caries, especially in children, would be altered. At present, 33 different chemicals are added to the water drunk by hon. Members in the Palace of Westminster. Before we drink it, the contents of an average glass of water have been through the body six times. The idea that we must not touch the water supply is ludicrous.

Fluorides exist in large parts of the country, especially Derbyshire, in quantities 10 times greater than would be needed to prevent tooth erosion. No one ever suggests taking the fluorides out of water. As the Minister knows, the Strathclyde judgment last June makes it extremely difficult for water authorities to know how they are protected by the law if they decide, as has been done in Birmingham, to add fluoride to the water.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that there is profound and sincere apprehension among large numbers of the general public, becaue fluoridation represents compulsory medication? The treatment is not necessary for water purification. I and many other hon. Members probably receive more letters on this subject urging us not to accept the priniciple of compulsory medication through fluoridation than on any other subject.

Mr. Pavitt: That argument is well understood. An organisation, headed by Mr. Clavell Blount, inundates

hon. Members with that type of argument. I disagree with it, for the simple reason that there is no suggestion that there should be compulsory taking out of fluorides. This compulsory medicine is found naturally in Derbyshire. There is no reason why other parts of the country should not enjoy the same services. I advise the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) to read the documents issued by the Department of Health and Social Security, the Medical Research Council and the British Dental Association. Dentists are trying to do themselves out of a job by ensuring that they do not have to fill any more teeth.

The Government have failed to support the generic substitution Bill which I have introduced three times. I hope to have the privilege of introducing that legislation again in the near future. Answers from the Under-Secretary of State to my questions show that a saving of £29 million can be made on 10 drugs by generic substitution. The Minister knows that the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee favour generic substitution, with safeguards. The Minister knows also, because he studied my Bill when it was printed last year, that it included those safeguards and did not interfere with clinical freedom. A doctor has only to say, "No substitute" and he gets the brand name he wants. If my legislation were on the statute book, there would be a saving of between £150 million and £200 million a year. One drug company representative calls on every nine general practitioners.

We know the arguments about the need for research. The last drug company that I had the privilege of visiting was spending £4 on promotion for every £1 on research. The Minister will know, because he has read the same statistics as I have read, that 73 per cent. of NHS drugs come from multinationals. In the main, drug research occurs elsewhere. I am sure that the Minister has seen the recently published survey showing that research on drugs in the United Kingdom is much less than claimed by drugs industries and the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry. If the Government took the step of accepting my legislation, they would help to release the resources for patient care about which they talk so much. Just as the Government will not tackle the tobacco companies because big business rules OK, they will not tackle the drugs companies, because, once again, it is the companies and shareholders' profits that call the tune. The Government should have the courage to do what is right.

My great problem concerns death from not lung cancer but emphysema. We all have to die. Hon. Members will know what happens if they have been to a chest ward and watched elderly patients struggling for every breath. I have been round one such ward with a consultant. At the first bed I heard, "Hello, Bill," "Hello, doctor," as the patient gasped. As he walked away, the consultant said, "I think he will die by Friday." At the next bed again I saw the struggle for breath, and after his cheerful word to the patient the consultant said, "I think he will probably last another 10 days." At the third bed, hearing the struggle and gasps for breath, the consultant said, "This is a tragedy. He will be tortured for at least six weeks before he dies. I wish that there was some way in which he could be put out of his agony." The way in which those people die is criminal. The Government have a responsibility to do something about that problem rather than about the number of deaths. I hope that the British Medical Association's campaign will stir the Government at last to do something other than offer platitudes.

6.27 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I am pleased to have been called to participate in the debate.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt), because I believe that people are interested in the wide issues involved in this debate on social services, the NHS, and education. Those issues affect everyone in society, and this is a good opportunity for the House to have a general debate on them.

I applaud the content of the Gracious Speech. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services on his first-class speech. We must compliment my right hon. Friend and his Department for all the work that they have done during the past 12 months on the vital issues that affect people. I always regret the fact that, during wide-ranging debates of this type, the Opposition Front Bench presents the inevitable hysteria and manufactured outrage. It advocates more legislation and expenditure. That is not the answer to our problems. The answer lies not in the expenditure of more and more money but in the quality of service provided, the way in which money is used, and the results achieved. The Opposition Front Bench is bankrupt of ideas on these matters. Its contribution was regrettable for its lack of content.

Most debates on pensions in this Chamber centre on the state pension. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), who, regrettably, is not in the Chamber at the moment, that there is a long overdue need for changes in the occupational pension schemes. About 12 million workers are covered by occupational pensions which are based largely upon the idea of a person remaining in one job for the whole of his or her working life, thereby penalising those who change jobs. This is still the case, even at a time when the Government are trying to encourage mobility within the nation's work force as part of their efforts to achieve economic recovery and lower unemployment.

Some people may resent the Government's proposed action in this area as such pensions are essentially a matter between employer and employee. However, considerable tax advantages are enjoyed by these schemes, and for the most part employees have little option but to participate in a company pension scheme, usually the only one offered to them. Indeed, it is often part of their terms and conditions of service.

Pension contributions are often the largest investment that employees ever make, and their financial well-being in retirement depends on their pension. However, most contributors have no control over this most important asset, nor in most cases do they have any knowledge about how their pension funds have performed. In addition, those who change jobs to meet employment demand or because of career advancement may jeopardise their financial security in later life. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South said that she had changed jobs several times and had lost her pension contributions.

The changes needed to ensure that occupational pensions become a valuable asset in retirement are threefold. First, those who leave a job early must know that their pension will have some real value on retirement if it has been frozen. Currently an employee who leaves a job at the age of 35 will receive a pension at the age of 60 or 65 which is based on his earnings at 35. Some inflation-proofing is obviously needed.

[Mr. David Evennett]

Secondly, for those who change jobs but do not want their pensions to be frozen until retirement, the right to transfer needs to be greatly improved. For example, they could transfer current pension rights to the new employer or to some other individual or pension of their choice. The development of new types of pension plan, such as the portable pension, would be of great help.

Thirdly, members of pension schemes should have the right to information on the performance of such schemes. Pension funds have assets of about £100 billion, yet currently the members have no right to know how those funds are performing, and as a result comparison with the performance of other funds is precluded. Consequently, investors are unable to move their money to a better performing scheme simply because of the lack of information.

We must congratulate the Secretary of State and his Department on the great deal of consultation between the Government and the interested parties that has taken place during the past year. There has been much discussion, and finally we are to get the action which is required. That must be welcomed.

As a former teacher, education provision is dear to my heart. I was interested, as we always are, in the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who has had vast experience in education. I am particularly pleased that the Government are committed to the continued improvement of education standards. Since 1979 there has been a concerted effort by the Government to ensure that education standards are raised, and with considerable result. There have been better standards of teacher training, greater parental involvement, improvement in the school curriculum, examination changes and so on. These are all to be welcomed as positive advances in the past few years.

I am fortunate to represent a constituency within the London borough of Bexley. As an education authority, Bexley has always maintained high education standards and has been wise enough to retain a variety of education. It has maintained grammar schools alongside comprehensive schools.

Like many hon. Members, I have occasional disagreements with my local education authority on a specific issue, but I totally support its general approach to education, because the standard of education provided is extremely high. It always seeks achievement. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North said that the Secretary of State had made a priority of under-achievers. Bexley has always tried to look after the under-achiever as well as to create standards of excellence for those with tremendous ability. If standards of education in Bexley are compared with those in inner London and other parts of the country, the results show that the authority's efforts to make education standards a top priority have been successful.

Education is important to the future of the nation, but it is perhaps even more important to the individual. A basic education forms the base for further education and training which, it is hoped, will make it easier to find worthwhile employment and to equip the individual for life. We must, however, start from basic education — we look for excellence and achievement later.

The present Government are the first for a long time to address themselves to the real problems in education. The improvement in the quality of those entering the teaching profession has already been noted, and the issues dealt with in the recent past are real issues, rather than the bogus issues and sterile arguments which were advanced in the decade prior to 1979.

I am, however, unhappy about what the Gracious Speech says on corporal punishment. I have considerable reservations on this issue. As a former teacher, I am not keen on the cane, the slipper, the ruler or other methods of corporal punishment, but in many serious cases, especially when a teacher is assaulted, corporal punishment may be an effective remedy. I recognise that there may be parental objections to corporal punishment and I am aware of its limited advantages. If we suggest greater parental involvement, parental views must be respected, and a genuine objection to the use of corporal punishment must be respected.

However, I have some reservations about the proposed legislation, especially if it follows the Government's consultation paper. Compromise is often the worst of both worlds, and that could be so in this case. I await the Government's Bill with interest, but I ask the Minister to give attention to the problem of differing punishments for the same offence. Two pupils might commit the same offence and the teacher could impose different punishments. I seriously doubt whether the proposed legislation in this respect would work.

I said that legislation is not the answer to every ill. The Opposition seem to think that legislation and more money will solve the problem. They do not. I remain interested in the working parties set up by the Secretary of State for Social Services into the future of the social services. He suggested that a new Beveridge was needed, but that could not be incorporated in this year's Gracious Speech because the reviews have not been completed. I await the outcome with great interest. Undoubtedly, a wide-ranging and radical reform will have to be undertaken, and I hope that the next Queen's Speech will contain such a proposal as the beginning of a phased programme of social welfare reform. As with the changes in education that have taken place in the last five years, and the proposed changes in occupational pension rights, it is long overdue.

6.39 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I hope that the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) will forgive me if I do not follow him exactly on the question of pensions, because I want to stay at the Elephant and Castle and talk more about the social security aspect of the debate.

The hon. Member suggested that perhaps we could not expect too much in this Queen's Speech because everything is under review or always being called into doubt. If the Secretary of State is to make proposals on the occasion of a future Queen's Speech—I do not think that his timing involved that intention as we can expect action from him sooner—I hope that, following some of his remarks about what will happen to the system of benefits as a result of his radical overhaul and review, our worst fears will not be proven.

At the time of the Budget there was a Treasury Green Paper dealing with public expenditure into the 1990s. Even then it was clear that there would be great difficulty not only in the DHSS but in all the spending Departments towards the end of the decade and thereafter. The Green Paper acknowledged that the aim was to set spending in

real terms at a fairly stable level between now and about 1986, and that subsequent decisions would have to be made towards the end of the decade. At that time I asked the Secretary of State whether there was an inbuilt problem, to which the Prime Minister has referred as the ticking bomb.

Largely because of the nature of the system, the growth of medical technology and the growing number of elderly people, all the financial pressures build up, so that the Green Paper is optimistic if not downright complacent. In looking at the welfare state, the Secretary of State faces the enormous problem that any decisions that he wishes to take must be within the straitjacket of that problem and the guidelines set down by the Treasury. I notice that he is nodding either in comprehension of, or agreement with, my argument.

I recall that the Secretary of State was rather sceptical when I raised the point earlier in the year. He felt that it was not as great a problem as I was envisaging. As the reviews continue, leaks emerge from the DHSS about what is being considered. I appreciate the Secretary of State's point that in a proper review it is necessary to look at everything. But there are indications that the thinking behind the review is largely related to meeting the kinds of demands that were highlighted by the Green Paper and that have been highlighted since by the continuing pressure on public expenditure. That has placed the Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues in an extremely difficult position.

I would argue that the reviews are fatally flawed. For a Government who preach the ethics and the business approach of the grocery shop in Grantham, it seems ridiculous, when looking at something as complex as the system of public expenditure as it manifests itself in benefits, to look only at the expenditure side of the account and not at the income side, particularly with regard to tax, and, most controversially, tax concessions.

It would seem to be cackhanded, to say the least, to suppose that anything approaching a fundamental or radical reappraisal of Beveridge — to use the Government's phrases since the reviews were announced —can be carried out when only one side of the scales is examined. The Secretary of State and his former colleague, who has gone to the Northern Ireland Office, will confirm that much of the evidence submitted to the reviews argued that there should be an integrated tax and benefit system; that the reviews should look at both tax and benefit and not just at benefit. The sense of disappointment or unease concerning the reviews is underlined by the fact that the stipulation that is frequently repeated is that they must be carried through on a revenue-neutral basis.

I hope that hon. Members in all parts of the House agree with the Secretary of State that there is a need for a radical and an unashamed look at the way the welfare state operates and at how it can be made more efficient— whether tax and benefits should be integrated and whether it is possible to be more selective. Will the Secretary of State agree that the points which have been put to him —more eloquently and in more detail than I can put them tonight—over the past few months are bound to undermine seriously the course of his investigation?

In the past two weeks it has become apparent that the Secretary of State is having to fight with the Treasury the age-old rearguard battle for his Department's spending. That hardly suggests that a radical reappraisal is taking place. It leads us to believe that ultimately the Treasury will use the review as a means of cutting further areas of public expenditure, without allowing any attempt to introduce a better system.

It is, perhaps, not surprising that the Gracious Speech makes no reference to the reviews or the benefits system generally. Nevertheless, it is a considerable disappointment. It is easy—as the Labour party spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), showed earlier — to oppose the Government from a very destructive point of view. But we have also to be constructive. If we cannot make reasonable suggestions, at least we should try to put down some reasonable markers to show our areas of concern.

The alleviation of poverty — an aim, presumably, with which all parties would agree—cannot be discussed without focusing the argument on the need for administrative efficiency. I think that the Secretary of State would agree with that. It should also focus on the extension of choice. I think that he would agree with that. As many have argued, we should try to move towards the elimination of the poverty trap and the unemployment trap. I think that there is a consensus in the House in that respect.

An increasing number of people are dependent on means-tested supplementary benefit. If the system were simplified, it could lead to a greater take-up of benefit. We should try to do something about the vast, complex network of means-tested benefits, and move towards a more straightforward basic benefit. That could then be topped up by housing credits, child benefits or child credits, or by clothing or heating benefits.

The computerisation of the PAYE system offers an excellent opportunity to integrate the tax and benefit system and to move towards direct payments in cash, if not in kind, and to increase the level of take-up.

When the Meacher committee examined many of the problems, a senior official at the Inland Revenue talked about computerisation. I cannot speak for the Treasury Bench, but I confess to having no knowledge of the problems raised by computerisation. It was disturbing that the Inland Revenue official made it clear that if the configuration of the computer brought in to computerise PAYE was not correct, it would be impossible to develop the system radically for many years thereafter. It is a crucial problem, and I put that to the former Minister for Social Security when I gave oral evidence to his review committee in the summer. Ministers must ensure that the correct type of computer configuration is used so that further development will be possible. The Government and future Governments should not be thwarted in any attempt to eradicate poverty simply because of a technical failure by the Inland Revenue.

There is heated debate within the Cabinet, the Government and the House about what is to happen to benefits. Like many others, I should like to make a special plea to the Secretary of State about supplementary benefit. If we can believe what we read, the Secretary of State has put up a courageous fight against the hard-faced men in the Treasury. He will have the full support of the Opposition Benches as he continues on his wet-ward way. On price protection and uprating, we hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be able to stick to what we had understood to be the stance of the Conservative party under the leadership of the present Prime Minister, particularly in relation to supplementary benefit and the long-term benefits.

[Mr. Charles Kennedy]

In their 1983 general election manifesto, the Conservatives pledged that:

"In the next Parliament, we shall continue to protect retirement pensions and other linked long-term benefits against rising prices."

As far as pensions are concerned the Government have stuck to that commitment, but there is now deep concern about the promise about

"other linked long-term benefits".

Those benefits were listed by the Chancellor in an answer to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore)—the shadow Leader of the House—on 11 July 1983. Long-term supplementary benefit itself was not included in the list. The doubts and concern were deepened by exchanges between the former Leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), and the Prime Minister about supplementary benefits and long-term linked benefits, in which it became clear that the Prime Minister was departing rapidly from the pledge that she seemed to have made.

Unemployment continues to bite hard and the numbers of the long-term unemployed are growing. It is surely inconceivable that the Government will not be able to pledge themselves to maintain the comparative value of long-term benefits. I hope that the Secretary of State will continue to make every effort both during and after the review process to ensure that they do.

I should also like to mention child benefit. In the 1983 election manifesto the Government reiterated their commitment to maintaining its value. The Prime Minister has reiterated that commitment again since the election, and on 27 June the Secretary of State repeated the promise in reply to a question from the then hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock). He had asked:

"Will the Secretary of State give a categorical assurance that there will be no introduction of means testing for child benefit, nor a reversion to a system of tax allowances?"

The Secretary of State said:

"On the first question, I give the hon. Gentleman a categorical guarantee about child benefit. We do not intend and never intended to change the basis of that benefit. That was just another scare during the election, which was denied at the time.' —[*Official Report*, 27 June 1983; Vol. 44, c. 357.]

More recently, the Secretary of State referred to the subject in Question Time. I hope that he will be able to stick to what he said then, not just until the dust settles over the current round of reviews, nor just during the longer term reviews, which he has described as the most radical since Beveridge, but as long as he occupies his present office. I hope that he will continue to set his face firmly against any increased selectivity or taxation of child benefit, which would be immensely damaging and would, I believe, be opposed not just by the Opposition but by significant quarters of the right hon. Gentleman's own party. To be fair, I believe that the Secretary of State shares our view. I wish him success in the battles that he will have to fight.

The Queen's Speech is thin in general, but nowhere is it thinner than in health and welfare. Perhaps we should breathe a sigh of relief that the Government do not wish to do too much this year.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Wait for Monday.

Mr. Kennedy: Yes, indeed.

The lack of health and welfare measures can only reinforce the view that, whatever is said at the Dispatch Box or at party conferences, the Government are increasingly isolated and insulated from the problems which people face, especially in the north of England and in parts of Wales and Scotland. Poverty is biting more and more deeply. In that respect, the Government do not represent the majority of the people. They do not enjoy the confidence of the majority of the people. Nothing in the Queen's Speech will dispel the growing awareness that the Government are out of touch with those in poverty and have indeed increased their numbers, and have proved themselves supremely unable to combat the ravaging effects of their own policies. We cannot support the Government in that aspect of their policies but, where the Secretary of State is able to fight a valiant rearguard battle and to preserve benefits, he will have our full support.

6.56 pm

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (Surrey, South-West): Reference has understandably been made in the debate to the Beveridge report on the welfare state. Those who established the welfare state would be disappointed that, in the face of mounting affluence and an enormous allocation of resources, there are still unmet needs in our society.

Seventy-seven per cent. of us own colour televisions, 81 per cent. have washing machines and 61 per cent. have cars. We should not forget our recent debates about Ethiopia, or forget that the average income in India is one fiftieth of the income of people on the poverty line in America. The Secretary of State has pointed to the huge allocation of resources by the Government to social security. Thirty per cent. of all Government spending is on social security — a budget of £37 billion a year. Every day, £100 million is spent on benefits. Of every £10 entering the family budget, £1·80 takes the form of benefits.

As some needs have been met, new needs have been uncovered. Some appear among the casualties of affluence, and others are connected with population changes.

During the next 30 years the number of those aged over 70 will increase by more than 15 per cent. and the number of those aged over 80 will increase by 50 per cent. It is in part a tribute to the success of the welfare state that life expectancy has been so greatly increased. Income maintenance is important to the elderly, and we must continue to produce the wealth from which we will pay the benefits, but it is even more important to create the economic stability which will release pensioners from the fear of inflation. Transport policies, housing programmes —I recently visited projects in my constituency which are examples of pioneering work in sheltered housing— and law and order are important for the elderly. Contrary to the statistics dealing with violence, many old people are afraid to go out. The police and the establishment of victim support schemes are therefore important in restoring their confidence. Health provision is vital to their welfare. My right hon. Friend has mentioned improvements in patient care which make a lot of difference to them. The 30 per cent. increase in hip replacement operations in five years has made more difference to the lives of the elderly than would have many other measures.

At Brighton last month, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that

"efficiency is not the enemy but the ally of compassion."

It is right that money spent on the Health Service should be spent cautiously and well. I hope that the Government will encourage the establishment of "well elderly clinics". In many areas there are far more people caring for the elderly than for children. We make tremendous efforts to prepare people for parenthood but do little to prepare them for caring for an elderly relative. Monitoring their welfare, the overprescribing of drugs and undetected medical conditions are all part of providing a service for the elderly.

I welcome the choice in residential care for the elderly. There is local authority, voluntary, private and housing association provision. However, I urge the Government further to develop their range of measures that are designed to improve the registration and inspection of homes for the elderly and to set proper standards and procedures to maintain them. I also urge the Government to consider clarification and co-ordination of methods to finance the variety of provision and to examine some of the anomalies.

Shortly after Beveridge's report, George Orwell wrote "1984". When considering the welfare state, some people may think that the Big Brother world of "1984" is all too apparent. When we listen to speeches such as that made today by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who wants to establish a monopoly of provision and is suspicious of any private or voluntary contribution, we may feel that "1984" is here. As in the industrial world, welfare needs the "doers and go-getters" to provide diversity. I am vice-chairman of the National Council of Carers and their Elderly Dependants. It was founded by "a doer and a go-getter", Rev. Mary Webster, in 1965. She noticed that single ladies with elderly relatives were often absent from church. Being absent from church is a sure way of getting a voluntary organisation founded on one's behalf. That is how Edward Rudolph founded the Church of England Children's Society. The National Council provides support for people who care for elderly relatives at home. Some 95 per cent. of our elderly are at home and four-fifths of the over-85s are at home. The National Council provides advice, companionship, and informed lobbying and it urges respite care. It is in the best tradition of voluntary activity to meet a need.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Ward) mentioned a Chinese proverb. I should like to repeat a proverb that I was told when I spoke at the India Welfare Society recently: "Light a candle; do not curse the darkness." We have many examples of people who have been prepared to light candles. This is the centenary year of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which was established to meet a need. In my constituency there are many examples of welfare provision that individuals and groups have set up autonomously. The Phyllis Tuckwell memorial hospital cares for the dying. We have the Alzheimer's Disease society and a club that provides for the care of the mentally ill. It uses volunteers who provide a service for the mentally ill and educates the public about the implications of mental illness. I welcome my right hon. Friend's initiative, which was announced in July, "Helping the Community to Care" under which £10·5 million was allocated over three years to assist volunteers, families, neighbours and others to care for the elderly.

In the welfare state there is a great danger of recipients feeling patronised by the providers. I spent many years as a social worker and will always remember a colleague telling me, "Teaching reading and writing in schools is really imposing middle-class values on working-class children." What absolute nonsense. Nor shall I forget the chairman of a school governing body telling me that when he selected staff he had to establish that they were ideologically committed to mixed-ability teaching because his primary goal was to achieve a classless society. That might be a laudable aim but not from a chairman of a board of school governors. That principle certainly did not apply to his football team.

I welcome the plans of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science to enhance the role of parents on school governing bodies. This is another example where the people involved often know as much as the experts. I welcome the decision of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services to consult the public in social security reviews.

Governments can allocate resources. They can ensure that they are competently and carefully administered. They can introduce legislation when valid grounds for introducing laws have been established. The Gracious Speech contains many such examples. Governments can also lead public opinion, respond to concern, promote debate and achieve good practice so that individuals, families, groups and communities, whether professional or voluntary, can work together to help the vulnerable, alleviate distress and meet disadvantage with the hope of improving the well-being of all of us.

7.6 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): One of the advantages of being called late is that one sees how other hon. Members have tackled the task of applying themselves to the Gracious Speech. I have an added advantage in that I am speaking after the hon. Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley). I hope she does not mind my recalling that, some years ago—she does not look as though it was many years ago—we worked together in the Child Poverty Action Group which is concerned with the welfare of poor families. She talked of the importance of people who go out into the world and light a candle. In one important respect she lit a candle at CPAG. Since the second world war, no one other than she has studied how poor families have managed over time. Many studies have taken snapshots but they have studied different people. Although many people remain poor for a long time, the number of people who move in and out of poverty, even at today's level, is significant.

I should like to pay the hon. Lady another compliment. When she stood up I was not sure what she would say. It is a great compliment to be able to say that an hon. Member's speech is not predictable. I hope that we shall hear her often.

I hope that my speech is not so standard as to be predictable. I should like to examine two areas of Government policy in which the Government have clearly outlined objectives but which, on analysis of progress towards them, appear flawed. The first is the economy, which I shall relate to the numbers of people in poverty. The Government are right to believe that it is foolish to try to separate the living standards of the community from the wealth generated by it. However, that should not be the only part of our debate as we should consider how to distribute wealth, whatever its level.

The Government's strategy to increase prosperity is clear. Hon. Members will forgive me if I remind them

[Mr. Frank Field]

what it is. The Government believe that the chances of increasing prosperity are increased if the rate of inflation is reduced. We must agree that the Government have succeeded in that, although some people have had to pay a considerable price for it. There has been a massive increase in the number of people unemployed. We cannot talk about a burden of unemployment which we share. Unemployment is not spread fairly throughout the community, but is borne by a minority. The price of reducing inflation is being borne by a minority of people.

Secondly, the Government say that reduced taxation will increase incentives. Their record on that is, at best, mixed. Thirdly, and most important, the Government believe that they can generate business prosperity by controlling interest levels.

That brings me directly to the debate which the Cabinet held this morning about the level of Government expenditure, and especially the level of Government borrowing. The Government claim that, if expenditure is not met by taxation, the difference must be met by borrowing. One can increase Government borrowing only if one borrows in the money market at increasingly favourable rates of interest. Therefore, the Government have set a target to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement as a percentage of the gross national product. There is a weakness in that strategy. In every other recession or trade cycle Government borrowing has increased. It has almost acted as Adam Smith's hidden hand. It has been the mechanism built in the economy to push the economy from the bottom towards growth. The Government have sought to reduce public sector borrowing in order to reduce interest rates and encourage business prosperity. That belief is central to their strategy.

I question whether the Government strategy can be successful because the natural mechanism in the economy to restore the movement back to full employment has been butchered by their intention to reduce PSBR as a percentage of national income. Therefore, the general prosperity for which they hope will not occur and there will be less money for the poor.

I turn to the objectives which the Government have set themselves regarding the poor. They seek to decrease the number of poor people and to increase the number of people who can free themselves from poverty. Yet in the Gracious Speech there is no mention of the Government's intentions regarding poverty. That is not because they have been successful in reducing the number of poor people. Perhaps the Secretary of State will at some stage tell the House when it can expect the next round of figures on the numbers of people on low incomes. The most recent figures relate to 1981. The Government must have the 1983 figures to hand. When they are published, hon. Members will not be surprised to see an increase in the number of poor people measured by the number living on supplementary benefit.

There is another contradiction in the Government's programme to free people from poverty and to give them an income above the poverty line as of right.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph): The hon. Gentleman's speech is so interesting that I wish to ask whether by "low incomes" he means individual low incomes, which may go to someone who is a member of a relatively prosperous household, or household low incomes.

Mr. Field: I mean household low incomes, because that is how the Government analyse the figures. In the analysis of low income families made by the hon. Member for Surrey, South-West she showed how important additional incomes, especially those of children, were to a household in raising the household income above the poverty line. The Government are considering that point in their review, and I hope that they will read what the hon. Lady said.

I come to the inconsistency in the Government's social programme. We must consider the level of national insurance benefits if we are to be successful in giving people an income which raises them above the poverty line. Yet the Government's record shows a list of national insurance cuts. I could give a list of social security cuts, but it is more difficult to give a list of health provision cuts. I hope that the Secretary of State managed to fight his corner with the Treasury by pointing out cuts which it had previously made in his budget.

As most people do not have large bank balances to fall back on, if national insurance cuts continue, they will be thrown back on the supplementary benefit system. Therefore, the number of people on low incomes and on means-tested low incomes will increase. If we seek to build a welfare state which will act as a floor on which people can build by their own efforts and free themselves from poverty, we must question an overall strategy which pushes more and more people to means tests, builds a ceiling over them and makes it immensely difficult for them to free themselves from poverty.

Child benefit has been alluded to by many hon. Members. It is a topic which the Government are currently reviewing. There is talk that the level of child benefit should be taxed. Before the Government announce their decision, I hope that we shall have an open debate about the pros and cons of such a move. I would not oppose the taxing of child benefit if all the revenue that accrued from it were ploughed back into the child benefit scheme. The Secretary of State could then announce an increase of about £2·30 a week in child benefit. As other hon. Members have pointed out, the Government have met their commitment to maintain the child benefit level in real terms; indeed, it is at a record level.

The Secretary of State will agree that, although the value of child benefit has been maintained, we have not maintained it at a sufficiently adequate level to keep it in line with changes in the tax threshold. Because of that there has been a change in the tax burden, both from rich to poor people and from those who are single without children to those with children. Another Government objective is to protect the family. I am worried about the change in the tax burden from those without children to those with children because we have not increased child benefit in line with changes in the tax threshold. Such a change would give the Government leeway to make up lost ground, but the lost ground will not be made up if the Secretary of State must surrender to the Chancellor of the Exchequer the revenue that results from taxing child benefit, because the Chancellor would use it to make other changes in the Government's programme rather than to increase child benefit.

Another reason why I urge such a change is that the more we consider the relativities of benefits and tax levels, the more we discover that they derive from the work done by Steven Rowntree at the turn of the century. Although he was fairly accurate in working out the minimum needs of men, he guessed the minimum needs of women and children. We know from what our European neighbours and the Americans have achieved in their budgetary studies that the benefits we pay to children are inadequate compared with those paid to adults. A change in child benefit financing such as I have outlined would allow the Secretary of State considerable revenue to make a major change in the welfare state that would begin to redress that historic grievance.

Above all, such a change would mean that the higher child benefit becomes, the more secure is the floor on which families can build futures for themselves. Although Labour Members say that that strategy alone is inadequate, we would be foolish to deny that it is part of the strategy that we wish to adopt.

I have raised some questions about the Government's economic strategy, which I believe is faulty. There are also faults in the social security system. However, I have ended with what I hope will continue to be a note of agreement across the Chamber about the importance of child benefit and the slow but sure steps that we should make in public debate about child benefit. If child benefit is taxed, we should use the revenue to increase child benefit rates.

I have ranged wide of the Gracious Speech, but I justify my contribution by saying that, although the subjects were not mentioned in the Gracious Speech, they will begin to dominate Parliament as the months go by. It is perhaps better to discuss some of them in a rather cooler atmosphere this evening.

7.22 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): The hon. Member for Liverpool, Broad Green——

Mr. Frank Field: Birkenhead.

Mr. Walker: I misread the list of Members. I knew that it was the Liverpool or Birkenhead area, because the hon. Gentleman is not appreciated by some people in the Labour party to the same extent as he is appreciated in the Chamber. His contribution was valuable and constructive, and although I do not agree with everything he said, it was put in a way that would not give offence; many of his colleagues could learn from that. I wish that we could transfer abilities that are valuable in the Chamber to our constituencies, where perhaps they would be properly understood.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) is not here. He said that unemployment in Scotland was especially ghastly, and I would have wished to have drawn to his attention the position in the Western Isles. The crofters there live on and work their crofts, yet they register as unemployed and obtain unemployment benefit. More importantly, they register as long-term unemployed. They and we know that the chances of their being offered jobs are extremely remote—I wonder whether some of them want jobs. They have helped substantially to distort the unemployment figures.

The Select Committee on Scottish Affairs recently visited Norway to consider the position of similar crofters in northern Norway. Their incomes are made up, by an organisation equivalent to the Scottish Development Agency, to about the national average wage for industrial workers. The amount involved is about the same, but the impact is different when one considers statistics. One country has low unemployment in its remote, sparsely populated areas, whereas in western Scotland and other remote areas of Scotland the unemployment figures are horrendous. Perhaps we could learn a lesson from Norway.

Along with many hon. Members, I must draw attention to something that the Queen's Speech did not say. I am sorry that there are no proposals to change the Civil Aviation Authority, and I am especially disappointed by the absence of a proposal to introduce a formal appeals procedure against decisions by national air traffic services. Parliament has given the CAA quango dictatorial powers against which there is no formal appeals procedure. That cannot be good for the quango, it cannot be good for the individuals who are affected by it, and it is certainly no way to run affairs in a democracy.

Today's debate is about education, health and social services, and I shall talk about their position in Scotland. Although my proposals and thoughts are primarily about Scotland, they are relevant to other parts of the United Kingdom. In some Scottish schools, there are disruptions and forced breaks in children's education. The teachers tell us that they are on strike. I suggest that some of them are behaving like members of an industrial trade union, not like members of a professional body, as they keep telling us they are.

Teachers behaving in this way cannot expect to enjoy the continued support of taxpayers for the maintenance of their professional terms of employment. They cannot expect to continue to receive support for the job-for-life element. In these difficult times, when we are all properly concerned for the many whose jobs have vanished and who are unemployed, how can hon. Members support or justify such a job-for-life element for individuals who have abandoned the most basic of their professional requirements — their duty to the children, the maintenance of standards and the setting of examples?

I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science that, when consideration is given to any request that teachers' pay and conditions be examined by an independent review body, one condition for the acceptance of such a proposal should be the introduction of measures to put teachers on the same basis as industrial workers whose practices those teachers are emulating. If they act unprofessionally and strike to the detriment of children, they should be treated in that way. In future, teachers should reap the rewards of their actions and be given terms of employment covered only by the employment protection legislation.

In that way, teachers will be in a position similar to that of unprofessional bodies, which have never claimed to be professional but which use the strike element as a means of putting pressure—properly in a democracy—on their employers. However, it is improper for people who claim to be professionals to expect to enjoy professional codes of conduct and conditions of employment, but then to behave unprofessionally.

In Scotland, the time has come for the Government to take a cold, hard, look at how we fund Scottish Health Service facilities. Much of the aggravation that we, as hon. Members, face, particularly about health provision,

[Mr. Walker]

is created by local demand to maintain facilities and services. I cite the example of the cottage hospitals, and the ever-increasing pressure by health boards for centralisation of services in large cities, with the consequent closing of cottage hospitals. This leads to demands by people living in rural areas for changes in the way that decisions are made, and pressure is put on the Secretary of State each time a cottage hospital comes up for closure for him to veto that closure.

That is why we should be looking also at the way that health boards in Scotland are managed and run. If we accept that the challenge of future funding will call for a dramatic new approach, I recommend that the Government examine the viability of handing over to the regional councils the responsibility for running and managing health boards in Scotland. It happens that the regional areas are the same as the health board areas. At the same time, the Government could look into the practicality of doing away with the local authority rates, a measure that I am confident will receive widespread support both in the House and outside. The alternative fund-raising—we all realise that funds have to be raised—could be done by introducing a local income tax in Scotland, making use of the computer facilities that already exist at centre 1.

There could also be a provision for local income tax to be raised at regional level. If these two changes were implemented, they would remove control from the unelected health boards, which are described by many in Scotland as being run by nameless and faceless people. No matter how good or dedicated they are, they are unknown and are appointed, so the public rarely knows who they are. Control could then be transferred to the regional councillors, who would be faced with elections at regular intervals, and so should be more responsive to local demands and situations. In this way, we would make the whole system more democratic but, more important, the funding and the raising of funds would be spread over all the taxpayers in the way that it is not at present in local authority spending.

There would also be advantages for other sectors, but as today's debate is about health and not about police and fire services, I shall not mention them. However, there would be tremendous advantages in making the local people pay for the local services provided, and what is more important than Health Service facilities?

In the remote part of Scotland that I represent, every time that there is a demand by the local health board for a change in health provision, pressure groups build up. They base their case largely on the problems that arise in the winter months, when many communities are isolated. It is not unusual for communities to be isolated for weeks at a time, and last year there was the appalling situation when many thousands of skiers were isolated at the head of Glen Shee in my constituency.

Therefore, we require both emergency facilities that are readily available and hospital facilities. Any pressure to close hospitals close to Glen Shee would receive short shrift, but other parts of Scotland have similar problems, with roads that are regularly closed. It is unwise to have all the health care located in large cities, because the distance from these cities to many points where problems may occur can be long, and in the winter months can mean the difference between life and death for critically ill patients.

At the moment we are looking at and reviewing local authority funding. Would this not be a unique opportunity to give health care to those who are represented locally and elected locally, instead of to appointees?

Earlier in the debate, the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt) made some observations about the tobacco industry. I have no interest in the tobacco industry. I am a non-smoker, and have never smoked. I am concerned because the hon. Gentleman continues to promote the idea that somehow the Government can take action to stop people smoking. There is only one way to do so, and that is by education and by encouraging people to change their ways. He seems to ignore the contribution that the tobacco industry makes world-wide to the economies of so many nations, and in particular to the well-being and education of Third world farmers. It provides training in crop rotation and husbandry, as well as giving the necessary funds to carry out these changes.

If we follow the logic of the hon. Member for Brent, South, he is asking us to ban all car driving because there are so many accidents on our roads. That is nonsensical as well. I do not doubt that the hon. Member for Brent, South cares deeply about this matter, as do many of us—I care deeply myself. However, I do not believe that the House or the Government should consider introducing nanny-type Acts which would probably fail because, like prohibition in the United States, they would not work.

7.35 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I have been listening all afternoon to the interesting speeches from the Conservative Benches. They have accused us of being devoid of ideas on the NHS. I commend to their attention the report of the Royal Commission on the National Health Service, on which I had the good fortune to serve for three years up to 1979. The report had the misfortune of landing on the desk of a Conservative Secretary of State for Social Services. Unfortunately, most of the recommendations in the report have not been implemented by the Government. If they are looking for ideas to promote the NHS, I suggest that they look again at the main recommendations of the report.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) mentioned the resignation from the Cambridge area health authority of one of our leading paediatricians, Professor John Davies. My hon. Friend read extracts from the letter of resignation, a letter that is well worth reading again. Professor Davies said:

> "You will know that my attitudes are essentially conservative, but there comes a time when one must be seen to live up to one's professed principles and true conservatism means recognising that the economy is made for man, and not vice versa . . . If we are not prepared to pay the economic price for acting morally, we may end up by paying the moral price for acting economically."

The Secretary of State for Education and Science is here now, and I remember him giving evidence to the Royal Commission on the National Health Service. He was asked whether the reorganisation of the NHS in 1974 was, in his opinion, a good or a bad thing. He gave the question a good deal of thought and in reply said that, on reflection, he thought that it was a bad thing. Perhaps the right hon.

Gentleman will also think that some of the cuts that the Government are now inflicting on the NHS are bad things when he comes to reflect in three years' time.

I want to deal specifically with the implications to the NHS of rate capping. Paragraph 16.2 of the Royal Commission's report on the NHS said:

"Good co-operation between the NHS and local authorities is important because their responsibilities overlap. The most common example of joint responsibility is the care of infirm elderly people. Many of them can be looked after at home without over-burdening the family if the local authority is able to provide a home help and meals on wheels, or day care and social work support, or sheltered housing; and the NHS provides family practitioner, health visiting and home nursing services. If these services are not available and properly co-ordinated where they are needed, an elderly person may need to go into an old people's home, or hospital. Effective co-operation is similarly important to the other main patient and client groups who require help from both NHS and local authority services — the mentally ill, the physically disabled and the mentally handicapped — and for the individual person at risk. Cost considerations apart"—

I am sure that Conservative Members will agree with this—

"most of us would prefer to live at home rather than in an institution or hospital, however congenial. It is obviously desirable that services should be provided in a way which makes the life of the patient as independent and satisfying as possible."

In his excellent pamphlet, Dr. Peter Draper has written at length about the health implications of rate capping. He has come to the conclusion:

"Demands on community care services"—

and "community care" is a phrase much favoured by the present Government—

"are currently increasing for three main reasons. First, there is the age factor—the absolute and proportionate number of the old and very old is still increasing—and, secondly, Health Service policies to close large psychiatric and mental handicapped hospitals create new and substantial needs for community care. Thirdly, new social legislation has increased the statutory services which a local authority must provide. The Criminal Justice Act 1982 is an example."

Government policy has encouraged the development of voluntary organisations as an economic way of providing services. Voluntary organisations generally are involved in initiating new projects and providing services for the less popular groups such as alcoholics and problem drug users. Such services are mainly or sometimes exclusively funded by local and central Government.

The probable impact of rate capping on community care is serious. While the probable effect of rate capping on local government services relevant to prevention and health promotion are on their own disturbing, the impact on community care, if the proposals are fully implemented, can only be described as catastrophic. The existing services are at the moment under considerable strain. For example, an inner London health visitor recently said:

"We estimate that on our patch there are at least six families which need social work input. They are not getting it because there is such a shortage of staff. Area offices just cannot accept any more case load. Health visitors and district nurses are doing quite a lot of work which should be undertaken by social services. We no longer even try to refer some things because it is no use."

There are three main reasons for concern about the impact of rate capping on community care. First, the Government's estimates of appropriate personal social service spending are strikingly lower than those judged necessary by local councillors and officers. For example, the Association of Directors of Social Services calculates the difference for London as being £126 million which would necessitate cuts equivalent to the total spending on homes for the elderly and home help services in London. For inner London, Government calculations allow for only 72 per cent. of planned spending.

The second reason for concern is that increasingly spending is falling on local government because of Government policy to shift care to the community and away from hospitals. That is universally seen as more desirable from the individual's point of view as well as a cheaper way of providing the same service. Joint financing arrangements with the NHS were introduced to assist that process which was aimed particularly at closing large hospitals for the mentally ill and the handicapped. Under those arrangements central funds are available for health authorities to work with local authorities to set up community-based services. However, over a few years local authorities are expected to take over the revenue consequences. Therefore, while Government funds are saved, local government picks up an increasing share of the bill for community services.

What joint financing means in practice can be illustrated by some figures from the London borough of Islington. With 340 Islington people in long-stay hospitals for the mentally handicapped and about 300 people in mental hospials, even if only 500 were returned to the community, about half of them because of the financial responsibilities of the borough, spending would be increased by £2·3 million. Currently, that additional spending would incur block grant penalties of £6 million.

That bleak climate affects those who are responsible for trying to plan and improve community care. The district medical officer of west Lambeth said:

"The main danger is to our carefully laid plans for care in the community. We envisage taking responsibility in the community for some 400 elderly, mentally ill and handicapped people over the next 10 years, opening seven residential homes a year together with associated day care all over the district. We are utterly dependent on the local authority and its ability to support these initiatives."

The third reason for concern is the impact on voluntary organisations which rely so heavily on local authority funding. As one community health council secretary put it recently:

"At present the council fund a wide variety of voluntary groups, including community transport, MIND, contact to family, the local disablement association. All those groups supply services to help maintain individuals in the community. Rate-capping will seriously affect this work and could lead to many organisations folding."

The voluntary organisations providing services for alcoholics, for the single homeless and for problem drug users face particular difficulties as the services they provide are not seen primarily as a local responsibility. For example, in 1983-84 services for drug takers in Greater London received £388,400 from the Government. Of that, £155,000 came from DHSS pump priming grants, and local funding is required to take on those services in the next few years. But given the present constraints, even previously sympathetic councils are not able to provide or promise future funding under the scheme. So future funding for those services is seriously threatened.

For the Government, one of the attractions of the move to community care has been the hope that financial savings might be made. However, that is not borne out by many authorities. For example, the director of social services in Newcastle recently estimated that a scheme for the mentally handicapped worked out by his department would cost £15,000, instead of £8,200 for institutional

[Mrs. Ann Clwyd]

care. A very important article in the journal *Public Administration* looks at spending trends in joint finance, and concludes:

"The way in which these resource trends have impacted on personal social services and the community care strategy in particular can be summarised as follows. First, recent Government policy has tended to squeeze out cost effective community care by the severity of the constraints placed on local authority spending. An attempt has been made to mitigate this by the use of joint finance, but in a harsh resource environment local authorities have a very limited capacity to pick up committed growth of this kind and are likely to make less effective use of such moneys. There has been a tendency to give higher priority to the mentally handicapped partly as a result of joint finance, but this has been accompanied by a worsening position for the elderly."

The move to discharge patients from mental illness and handicap hospitals has led to an increase in the current boarding and lodging allowances paid by the DHSS. The rapid growth in the number of private homes for the elderly has also increased social security spending in that area, especially as the Government's financial commitment has appeared to be open-ended. In a report to the Select Committee on Social Services the Association of Directors of Social Services alleged that private lodging-house owners were receiving as much as £80 a week from social security in order to house mentally ill and handicapped people in shared rooms. The association's president stressed that the potential waste of public money was enormous.

The British Association of Social Workers, in evidence to the Select Committee on Social Services, said that more than one fifth of all local authorities were refusing to take on further commitments in joint finance. Much of the evidence to the Select Committee on Social Services which considered community care commented on the need for more finance to promote a real shift towards the community and on a need to measure the results of extra resources.

Although much concern has been expressed about the slowness of the move towards community care, many people are worried about the effects of the initiatives that have already taken place. Large institutions are closing without the necessary facilities being available to care for ex-patients. When the Secretary of State for Education and Science was Secretary of State for Social Services, I was on the board of a regional health authority which thought that its duty was to close as many mental handicap hospitals and institutions as possible and to cut their populations by half. Many of those people were discharged into the community without adequate resources being made available. Some of them were readmitted to those hospitals because of malnutrition while they were being looked after in so-called community homes.

The Richmond Fellowship produced a report in 1983 on mental health policy entitled "Mental Health and the Community". It said that the number of hospital beds was being reduced at a far faster rate than the replacement community option was being constructed. An article in the magazine *World Medicine* describes the difficulties of mental patients after discharge which have resulted in a surge in the number of suicides shortly after discharge. In its evidence to the Select Committee on Social Services, the Campaign for Mentally Handicapped People expressed doubts about private residential homes for the mentally handicapped which might not meet other needs such as day-time occupation, a full and varied leisure life and access to medical and paramedical services. I certainly share that concern.

Similar anxieties have been expressed about private residential care for the elderly. An article in the *Health and Social Services* journal in July, entitled "Options in the NHS", argues the case for specialist geriatric services against private nursing homes. The National Schizophrenia Fellowship has strongly condemned inadequate after-care for discharged patients most recently in its evidence to the Select Committee. The implications of so-called community care for women are well documented. Often the phrase "community care" means that women are expected to care. The real costs of care are, therefore, disguised.

The Equal Opportunities Commission, in a report in 1982 called "Care for the Elderly and Handicapped—Community Care Policies and Women's Lives", concluded:

"The expectation that a woman will provide the necessary care within the family, whatever the cost to herself, still underpins the reality of community care. Cuts in health and social services and cash benefits intensify the demands placed on carers. They mean that there are less physical resources to aid them, less alternatives to relieve them and less money to support them. Savings in public spending increase the cost to the carer in terms of her social life, her employment prospects and ultimately her physical and mental well-being. These costs are borne individually and do not figure in any public spending accounts. The price paid is the restriction placed on women's opportunities."

Rate capping is bad for all of us, and particularly for the health of us all. We have a deceitful Government who have no scruples about saving at the expense of the old, the sick and the disabled. I have been told that this evening the Minister for Housing and Construction is jubilant at the agreement to trim spending on housing by only £65 million. In a country in which 78,000 people are homeless, 1·2 million people are on housing waiting lists, 192,000 families live in overcrowded houses, 1·1 million houses are unfit for human habitation and 390,000 dwellings do not have a bath or inside toilet, it is a disgrace for any housing Minister to claim that he is jubilant. Less money for housing repairs and improvements can lead only to a decline in housing standards, which we all know are directly linked to the health of everyone in this country.

7.58 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): One of the pleasures of this debate has been the undoubted sincerity and compassion of hon. Members on both sides of the House when dealing with health and social security. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt), who has had a lifetime of concern for the sick and disabled. But, unlike him, I was not surprised that the Gracious Speech did not contain any reference to the Health Service.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out clearly that the Government are committed to the Health Service and have demonstrated that by the fact that they have more than doubled expenditure on it since coming to power. Not only have the Government increased revenue expenditure on the Health Service; they have reinstated the capital-intensive building programme which the Labour party scrapped when it was last in power.

My constituency has been a beneficiary of Government policy towards the National Health Service in that its long

awaited new hospital at Castle Lane is to be constructed shortly. The whole of the Wessex area, which has been seriously underfunded compared with other regions, is benefiting from the Government's review of relative funding which has resulted in an acceptable increase in available resources. I am happy with what the Government are doing and have every confidence in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team.

I was not surprised that there was no direct reference to benefits and social services in the Queen's Speech because my right hon. Friend is conducting one of the most serious and far-reaching reviews of the benefits system ever undertaken. Unlike the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy), I do not agree that my right hon. Friend should seek to exclude means testing for certain benefits. I believe that one of the scourges of the present system is that benefits are not means tested. Given that we shall always have finite resources, it does not make sense to spread resources as thinly as possible over the entire population when we could, by means testing, direct resources to those most in need.

The Secretary of State should consider child benefit in particular. All hon. Members with children are entitled to receive child benefit—or rather their wives are entitled to receive it. It is ludicrous that my wife and the wives of other hon. Members should receive child benefit when, as members of the more affluent section of society, we do not need it and when poorer people rely upon it to feed and clothe their children. Through means testing we could adjust the balance. We could give more to those most in need and nothing to those who do not need it.

Similarly we should carefully examine the death grant. It is ludicrous that the grant is set at £30. It has remained unchanged for many years. We are all entitled to receive it, whereas the overwhelming majority of people do not need it. Most estates are capable of providing sufficient funds to pay for a funeral. Even in my constituency, which is widely regarded as being relatively affluent — although it has its poorer pockets—elderly people have said to me, "I cannot afford a funeral when I die. I am desperately worried about it and about imposing an intolerable burden upon my children." They say that they are terrified of going to a pauper's grave.

Some form of means testing should be used. For the death grant the form would be simple. Every person who dies has a return of probate. When the level of probate is above a certain set level the death grant should be refused. When the executors of an estate believe sincerely, and make a declaration to that effect, that the estate is expected to be such that funeral expenses would place an intolerable burden upon relatives, the death grant should be paid. We should also have power of recovery if a false declaration is made as well as a penalty if it is made knowingly. Such a scheme would be simple to administer and it would give great comfort to those who are worried about dying. At the same time, it would save a great deal of money which the Treasury could spend on the more needy.

It will not surprise hon. Members to learn that I consider the blind to be a needy group because recently I tabled an early-day motion on the blindness allowance. Before I was elected I believed, with the majority of people, that blind people received an allowance because they were blind. I was shocked and appalled to find that they received no such allowance. No special payment is made by the state to the blind. Indeed, blind people do not normally qualify for mobility allowance, invalidity allowance or attendance allowance. Only if a blind person suffers from an additional infirmity does he qualify for allowances.

If a blind person is so poor that he has to rely upon supplementary benefit, he may receive an addition to that benefit because he is blind. That addition is £1·25 a week. That is to compensate the poorest in our society for the disadvantages of being blind. It does not go anywhere near covering the costs of being blind. It does not cover additional transport costs, books in brail or the million and one additional costs incurred by the blind because they are blind.

The blindness allowance has not been raised since 1969. It was first introduced in July 1948 at 15 shillings a week. According to a parliamentary answer last year, the current purchasing value of that 15 shillings is over £8. It might now be nearly £9.

We have a duty to do something about the plight of the blind. I recognise that the Government have tried to do something for them. For example, they doubled the tax allowance, which now stands at £360 a year. However, that is giving money to the one section of the blind that least needs it—those receiving income and paying tax. Seventy per cent. of the blind do not earn enough to pay tax, so the money is being given to the wrong people.

My early-day motion suggests replacing the existing benefits, such as they are, with a single, means-tested blindness allowance. I emphasise "means-tested" because it is no use taking what limited funds the Treasury can give to the blind and spreading them thinly over their entire number. We must in this, as in all benefits, ensure that they are directed to the poorest and neediest in our society. Only then can we fulfil our obligation to look after the weak.

8.11 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I welcome the compassionate speech of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill). I, too, have listened to all the speeches today and there has been great compassion in those of Conservative and Labour Back Benchers alike. But there was no compassion in the speech from the Secretary of State, yet that is where it is needed. We criticise him strongly for that.

I agree with the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West about the raw deal experienced by the blind. Like him, they tell me of their problems when they come to my Saturday morning surgeries. I hope that the message will be heard by the Government and that they will take action.

The death grant is another area that needs a compassionate approach. The Secretary of State stood at the Dispatch Box today but showed no compassion. The right hon. Gentleman's speech was wicked in many respects. He spoke about the pharmaceutical industry and its profits, but did not say that he would take action to stop profits being raked off from the NHS and from those who have to pay for their prescriptions. I understand from the press that the Chancellor will announce another increase in prescription charges when he makes his autumn statement next week. That is not compassion; it does not help those in need.

Mr. Butterfill *rose*——

Mr. Haynes: I cannot give way as there is little time left and many other hon. Members wish to speak.

[Mr. Haynes]

I can understand why the Secretary of State does nothing about the massive profits of the pharmaceutical industry — it contributes to Conservative party funds. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West can shake his head, but I know that that is true.

The waiting lists in the NHS are shocking. The Secretary of State says that he is pouring money into the NHS, yet the waiting lists in many areas become longer and longer. I know of many people who require orthopaedic surgery—they have made their contribution to our nation, but the Government are not prepared to help them. The Government help their own and pour money into their pockets. In 1979 they reduced income tax by 26p in the pound to help those who contribute to Conservative party funds. They will not help those in real need.

The Government ask for cost-cutting exercises and more efficiency in the public sector. Perhaps there could be more efficiency in hospital theatres, where millions of pounds' worth of equipment stands idle for many hours a day. Why do not the consultants and physicians work at night for a change, as do others in the NHS? Why do they not perform their operations at night, thereby helping more people and cutting down waiting lists? They will not do so because that would mean that they could not play golf or work in the private sector. They even make the excuse that if more people had operations there would be insufficient beds for them. The answer is that the Government should cease their rate-capping exercise because community services are crucified by the cuts. Local authorities should be given sufficient money to provide proper services so that people could leave hospital sooner and be looked after properly at home. That would make more beds available.

The Government must consider the matter sensibly. Conservative Ministers are not prepared to listen to sensible suggestions. It is political dogma. Not long ago Scotland Yard referred to the number of its officers who belonged to the Freemasons. My district health authority is loaded with people belonging to the Freemasons. What will the Government do about that?

Mr. Boyes: Nowt.

Mr. Haynes: My hon. Friend is right. The Government are not prepared to listen—to them, it is water under the bridge. The Government should show a more compassionate approach and provide the finance to help those in real need.

Elderly people speak to me about their fears that they will either have a pauper's grave or have to sell their treasured possessions to meet the undertaker's bill. The Secretary of State for the Environment stood at the Dispatch Box more than two years ago and said that, following talks with the national conference of the British Legion, the death grant would be fixed at a higher rate within six months. Yet the death grant has not been sorted out — the Government are kicking it around like a football. They could not care less.

There is a shortage of nursing staff in our hospitals. We have an opportunity during the summer recess to make visits in our constituencies and to attend meetings to discover what is happening in the areas that we represent. I found that within the district health authority in my constituency there is a shortage of nurses in the mentally handicapped and geriatric services. In one instance there were two nurses on night duty looking after 143 mentally handicapped patients. The fire prevention officer told me that there would be serious loss of life if there were a fire. What is to be done about that? Money can be found to buy weapons of destruction but it seems that we cannot find enough money to provide proper facilities to help the seriously ill and to provide equipment to save life. It is shocking that the Government cannot make that provision.

When I learnt that there was a nursing shortage within the health authority in my constituency I stepped back three years. The training school for nurses in my constituency has a complement of 52 but the NHS cuts led to the nursing budget being cut within the authority. The result was that only 36 young lasses were trained as nurses. Three years have passed and the authority finds that it does not have enough nurses for the mentally handicapped and geriatric services. That is an example of what the Government are doing.

I hope that Ministers and Conservative Members will wake up to what is happening. My right hon. and hon. Friends know what is going on. I had the pleasure of listening to my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) addressing the House from the Opposition Dispatch Box. Earlier, the Secretary of State for Social Services had ducked about all over the place to dodge the questions which were put to him. Those who read tomorrow's edition of *Hansard* will learn exactly what took place at the beginning of the debate.

What will be the end result of the Government's cost-cutting and inefficiency? I understand that there is a review taking place of the ambulance and fire services, our emergency services. Are they to be subjected to a cost-cutting exercise? If the Treasury Bench moved in that direction, that would be the limit. The Government Front Bench should be thinking again if that is the intention. If the Government are carrying out a review to improve the emergency services, I shall go along with it, but there should be no cost-cutting exercise for the emergency services.

It seems that those outside this place are not aware of the effect of the Government's cuts. I hope that the Secretary of State for Education and Science will listen to what I am saying instead of talking to his Parliamentary Private Secretary.

There will be a massive problem in my constituency in 1985 when children move from primary to comprehensive schools. The Secretary of State for Education and Science travels throughout the country talking about parental choice but that is a load of rubbish. In my area there are two primary schools that feed into two comprehensive schools. If the parents decide that all their children should go to one of the two comprehensive schools, there will be an obvious problem. The right hon. Gentleman will understand the problem and he should be aware that it is arising. Why does he travel the country telling parents that they can have a choice? The county councils' education committee in my consitituency has to determine how many children can go to one school and how many can attend the other. It is necessary to maintain the right balance because otherwise one school would be overloaded as a consequence of parents exercising their choice.

Conservative Members must realise, as I do, that from time to time a boundary has to be changed because the birth rate on one side of a town is higher than on the other. There has to be a balance and so the boundary is moved. Everybody understands that. It is wrong for the Secretary

of State to say at the Dispatch Box and at various conferences that there is parental choice. I wish that he would drop that, because so-called parental choice is thrown in my face when I live up to my responsibilities, meet my constituents and answer their questions as well as I can. The fact remains that the right hon. Gentleman is talking about parental choice and I am not.

Sir Keith Joseph: My colleagues and I try always to talk in terms of giving parents a chance to state and obtain, if possible, their preference. I agree that we cannot give them choice because of many factors, some of which have been mentioned by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Haynes: I understand that to a certain extent. The right hon. Gentleman must understand that in many areas eight or 10 parents obtain their choice of schools for their children and the rest do not. The Government must be careful in what they say. People latch on to what they say and I get kicked up the backside instead of the Secretary of State. I am not responsible for his statements and I hope that he will consider what I have said.

8.28 pm

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): I was delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. McNair-Wilson) in his place earlier this evening. It is extremely pleasing that someone who has been treated within the National Health Service is able to be with us once more. I endorse what he had to say about patients' rights. We must ensure that we have a Health Service that provides for the concerns of individual patients. All too often patients' private worries may not be considered sufficiently when a consultant or a nurse is endeavouring to care for a large group of patients.

I welcome the announcement of reviews of various parts of the social security benefit system which were made earlier in the year. I hope that these several studies will result in a comprehensive change to the benefit system. Over the years, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services said, a variety of Governments have had many good reasons for modifying and adding to the original system, and the objectives of the system have become muddled. More importantly, the intended beneficiaries are confused. Those who administer the system have to battle through a mass of documentation and advice. There are many variations in individual needs, the complexities of the system are absurd and there is a pressing need for simplification. At the same time, income and means-tested benefits create the so-called poverty and unemployment traps.

It is indefensible, for example, that a married couple with two children can move from weekly earnings of about £60 to about £110 with virtually no change in their disposable income. For a significant band of people an increase in weekly earnings can result in less money for a family to spend. One of the causes is income tax. It is nonsense that, on the one hand, income tax may be charged while, on the other, various income and means-tested benefits are given. Yet more than 1 million families who pay tax receive housing benefit. That cannot be sensible. It is stupid.

I agree with much of what my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) said on child benefit, death grant and blindness allowance, but I hope that we will not introduce a whole series of individual means tests. By all means, if necessary, consider the income received through various grants and benefits within the income tax structure and assessment of total income, but let us not have further individual means tests. The position is confusing enough without introducing yet more means-tested benefits.

Our means-tested benefits are illogical and costly to administer. They are often unfair in their implementation and, furthermore, a significant disincentive to employment. For many people, if employed, they are a disincentive to work and progress. Some complain about the standard rate of income tax at 30 per cent. being a disincentive to advancement, but the poverty and unemployment traps create disincentives of a completely different magnitude.

I welcomed the substantial increase in tax thresholds earlier this year. I believe that the highest priority in any further tax changes and reductions must be to raise still further the tax thresholds and reduce the overlapping of taxes and benefits. I emphasise that this is not a new problem. Indeed, when my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for Education and Science was responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services, the problem was similar. Governments may come, Governments may go; but this problem has not been resolved. It is high time that it was. I hope that eventually a tax credit scheme will be introduced. I hope that, in the review of the present system, the rationalisation of the present creeping system will be directed to that objective. I hope also that a future Gracious Speech will make that commitment.

My second issue relates to education. I am concerned that some of the major industrial firms in my constituency repeatedly tell me that they are experiencing, even now, great difficulty in recruiting people for development work or other highly skilled occupations. I have been greatly impressed by the initiatives that have been taken during the past year by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I strongly support the objectives set for secondary education and those in the examination system, but I remain concerned as to whether we are sufficiently extending and developing enough individuals to play leading roles in the industrial and commercial activities of the future. It is essential to our success in a highly competitive world that we exploit to the full the abilities of our people. I believe that we need to encourage more people to participate in higher education and that it is necessary to provide places for them. Only by making that investment will the more able be equipped to create the wealth and the jobs to help the less able, the weak and the elderly.

I am aware that there are cost implications in both the issues that I have raised. In the second of those issues, I believe that those cost implications are more than justified, because that investment is essential for our future industrial well-being. I do not wish to go back in another five years to the firms in my constituency and have them still complain that we are not doing enough to prepare individuals for the new technologies. If those firms are complaining in five years, this country will not have the funds at its disposal to provide for the weak and the elderly.

Similarly, on the first issue, I recognise that swiftly to change to a tax credit scheme would be immensely expensive. However, if we move gradually to such a scheme and remove some of the anomalies and stupidities

[Mr. Timothy Wood]

of the present system, we will create an arrangement that is more understandable and has more scope for help for those who need it and for incentive for those who could benefit by being able to advance in their jobs or to obtain jobs. I hope that, despite the small numbers here this evening, there will be plenty of people who will hear and read my comments.

8.37 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): In the short time available to me, I want to correct something that is said regularly by the Government about the DHSS strike in my constituency and my hon. Friends' constituencies in north-east England. The House and the country at large are deliberately and maliciously misled about the strike's causes, and I hope that this evening the record will be corrected and straightened out. On 22 October, in the other place, the noble Lord speaking on behalf of the Government did not once give the reasons for the strike. Speaking on 23 October 1984, answering questions in the House, the Prime Minister never mentioned the real causes of the strike. Today, the Secretary of State for Social Services mentioned the strike but not its reasons.

I do not believe that people strike for nothing. If workers go on strike, there is an underlying cause. I want to explain why the people in the north-east are taking strike action against the Government's proposals and, acting on the Government's behalf, the management.

As we know, the Government have instructed management in DHSS centres and other centres to carry out a cost-cutting exercise. The Government asked for a saving of £700,000 in the computer centres in the north-east. Without much ado, trade union members and management were able to save £650,000. The argument is, therefore, about a residual amount of about £46,000. To save that £46,000, the DHSS management decided to have a ridiculous and stupid head-on clash with the trade unions. Consequently, the wages of workers were cut by between £8 and £14. Surely, at this time, with escalating prices and indeterminate inflation, one could not expect people in the north-east of England easily to accept a cut in wages. No one in his right mind would accept that without an argument. But the DHSS management was under Government instructions, and, as we have seen on a number of issues, the Government prefer clashes to peaceful and sensible negotiations. They wanted this strike for reasons which they will eventually have to explain.

The public, not to mention hon. Members, have never been told of the consequences of this strike. In order to save £46,000 the people of Britain are already facing a bill of more than £100 million, and it is steadily growing. The latest estimate is that it is now approaching £120 million. That bill will have to be paid because of the intransigence of the Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues. At a conservative calculation, it will take about 2,000 years to recoup what this strike has already cost. We shall still be paying the bill in the year 4000. That is the stupidity of what is happening.

Up to now, the strike has cost between £37 million and £40 million for Post Office emergency payments, £33 million in overtime payments throughout DHSS offices, and £11 million at the Washington child benefit centre. Millions of pounds have been overpaid, and that will have to be corrected. Indeed, there is a rumour that the Minister was overpaid this month, but as he is not present he will be unable to comment. Up to now, 3,800 extra DHSS staff have been taken on. The total cost in a full year will be about £38 million. In addition, 260 new recruits have been taken on to prepare Giros and other cheques.

I stress again that the Government are trying to save £46,000, yet they are prepared to let the strike continue. Conservative Members have the audacity to claim that this strike action has been taken by uncaring people. I and my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) have regularly spoken to these workers. We know that they care a lot more than Conservative Members about those who are in need of these payments. The Government pretend to care, but they show that they do not by not settling this strike through sensible agreement.

The Secretary of State told us this afternoon that, of the three unions involved, two had settled. That suggests that the majority of staff have settled on the management's offer. One of the unions, the Civil Service Union, has six members; the Society of Public and Civil Servants has 45 members; and the Civil and Public Services Association, the largest union, has 280 members. When the CPSA members voted, they rejected the management offer by 227 votes to 23. Although I do not speak on behalf of the two smaller unions, I understand that they have accepted the offer only in principle.

Extra cash is given to the staff because they work irregular hours under a shift rostering system. They receive 20 per cent. for a three-shift roster and 10·5 per cent. for a two-shift roster. The sum they receive is similar to the disturbance grant. During the last negotiations, management's proposals for the rerostering schedules were not at all clear. Consequently, it was impossible for the unions to ascertain the wages implications of the offer. Logically and sensibly, they rejected it. Management was also unable to guarantee that all those who wished to work a three-shift roster would have the opportunity to do so.

Let me add further confusion by quoting what the Government spokesman in the other place said. In reply to one noble Lord he said:

"and who are affected or could be affected by the changes that have been proposed, will in fact continue to be paid at the rate that is in hand at the moment."

That sounds fine, but two or three minutes later he said in the same reply to another noble Lord:

"In this dispute the unions appear to want the existing shift patterns to be set for all time. Obviously, this questions management's right to manage. This is something that the department cannot, and should not, accept.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 October 1984; Vol. 456, c. 5-6.]

Having first said that everything was fine, he then said that it was not because the department would demand the opportunity to manage the staff.

It should be noted that there will be a full review of the system in 1986, and although the staff may get what they want now the management has made it absolutely clear that, as a consequence of the 1986 review, it would not guarantee any changes in permanency of service.

Mr. Wood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boyes: I usually do, but on this occasion I shall not. Some of the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends still wish to participate and I have promised my Whips that I shall finish at 8.50 pm. If the hon. Gentleman intervenes, he will merely deprive his hon. Friends of time and I am sure that he would not wish to do so.

In the case of the miners, the Government are prepared to cost the taxpayers any amount of money. They do not care whether the bill rises to £2 billion, £3 billion or £4 billion. Out of wicked political vindictiveness they are prepared to make the taxpayers foot the bill. The same applies to the DHSS strike. In order to save a paltry £46,000, the country will have to pay hundreds of millions of pounds. That is unacceptable to the Opposition. I only wish that the Government would find it unacceptable and would tell the managers in the computer centres in Washington and other parts of the north-east, "Get our people back to work. Get these Giros paid to those who need them."

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Is my hon. Friend aware that there was a complete lack of consultation prior to the management vindictiveness against the workers in Washington and Newcastle?

Mr. Boyes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He and I have met the unions and know what the situation is. No consultative procedures were carried out.

This strike could be ended tomorrow morning if the Secretary of State for Social Services told his permanent officials in the DHSS, "Give those people the shift rostering payments to which they are entitled. Get the computers running again. Begin proper negotiations."

As I have already said, the people of the north-east have already given up £650,000 out of £700,000 without any problem. They surely have a right to proper talks on the remaining £46,000. I hope that the Minister will confirm that he will get these people back to work on proper pay.

8.50 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): I can understand the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) wanting to argue the case that he has, and he will not expect me to answer it at this hour. At least he has put the case in the way that it should be put in this arena or across the conference table. It is unfortunate that he appears to be supporting a strike which is causing a great deal of inconvenience and distress to many pensioners who are innocent parties. Surely there are better ways than that of settling industrial disputes.

I particularly welcome the commitment in the Gracious Speech to increase efficiency in the public sector, and there is no larger public sector than the National Health Service. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his production of the annual report on the Health Service. It is a first-class document. Its style, content and presentation are admirable. It should be required reading for all hon. Members, particularly those on the Opposition Benches who are sometimes somewhat selective in their comments on the Health Service.

I suspect that it is unlikely that our constituents—who, after all, pay for and are the users of the Health Service—will have the opportunity in large numbers, or the inclination, to study the material in the report, quite apart from the fact that it costs nearly £7. My right hon. Friend might like to consider producing a popular version of the report—perhaps in leaflet form—which could be available in doctors' waiting rooms, hospitals, libraries, and so on, so that our constituents could see exactly what the Health Service is doing, what its resources are, and how it uses them.

The task of the National Health Service is to restore the sick and injured to full health and to seek to maintain the healthy in that condition. It is a health service; it is not a cleaning service, catering service or a laundry service. Therefore, I warmly support the efforts of my right hon. Friend and his Ministers to encourage competitive tendering for those parts of the operation of the service.

In his speech, my right hon. Friend referred to a health authority which was saving £1·4 million on domestic services. I think that he was referring to my local health authority in Bromley, which has now, in one of its hospitals, put catering out to tender. In one hospital the projected annual saving is £40,000. Extrapolating that figure throughout the country, the potential for savings can be seen to be enormous. It would make more resources available for the care of the patient. It is the exercise not of party dogma, but of good housekeeping.

There is scope for savings in the prescribing of drugs. I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement about the discussions that he intends to undertake as to the extent to which generic drugs can be prescribed. My right hon. Friend also referred to the quantities in which they are prescribed. It is understandable that doctors do not want to have their patients coming back continually for repeat prescriptions, and that therefore they tend to be rather generous. I am sure that we all know of cases where people have been given a prescription for far more tablets or medicine than they need to use. Medicine chests in homes throughout the country are full of unwanted pills, ointments and medicines.

I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to a report of a two-week campaign by local pharmacists in Cornwall to have unwanted pills and other medicaments returned. The value of the products which had to be destroyed after being returned was £150,000. On a national scale, that would amount to a saving of about £20 million. It was a small exercise in a small area, and I am not suggesting that it is necessarily typical, but it suggests that there is scope for substantial savings in the quantity of drugs prescribed.

I was interested to note that my right hon. Friend referred to tranquillisers. I have had some disturbing evidence of the extent to which they are prescribed for people in times of particular stress—perhaps a family quarrel, a divorce or a bereavement. The prescription having been given for that purpose, it is often repeated indefinitely, despite the fact that originally it was presumably for a transient matter.

In an intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Mrs. Knight) spoke of people having tranquillisers for two or three years. I know of a case in my constituency where a man was on tranquillisers for 17 years. That is extraordinary because, apart from the distress caused to the man in being continually tranquillised, he became, as it were, addicted and went through a very difficult time when he finally decided, of his own accord, to come off the tranquillisers. Apart from all the human misery involved, a considerable sum of money was spent unnecessarily.

With regard to the abuse of drugs, the Department has taken several initiatives. The problem has been the subject of debate in the House. This is an area in which an attempt is being made to prevent people from needing the services of the NHS.

Several initiatives have been taken by the Department in encouraging the sensible use of alcohol. Most people enjoy alcohol, and it can be positively beneficial, but the Department is right to be concerned about the 1 or 2 per cent. of users of alcohol who abuse it.

[Mr. Roger Sims]

I wish that I could be equally complimentary about another area of preventive medicine. I refer to page 11 of the report on the NHS, where it says that

"smoking remains the major avoidable cause of death and disease".

I warmly endorse the remarks of the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt), who has fought a campaign in the House on the issue for many years. I hope that before long we can have a debate devoted to the subject. Although the Department supports Action on Smoking and Health and the Health Education Council financially, Government action amounts to very little. The sponsoring of sports and the arts by tobacco companies now extends into an area where some of the tobacco companies associate their brand names with holidays and, by inference, good health. To use the hon. Gentleman's words, that is making a fool of the Government. The free advertising given to cigarettes on television—including the so-called non-commercial BBC — would be laughable if it were not tragic in the influence that it has on young people.

There are several points that I should like to pursue with my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) if time allowed. Perhaps I shall have some other opportunity to do so.

Proposals are outlined in the Gracious Speech which, if Parliament approves them—after, no doubt, a good deal of argument—will be the law of the land by this time next year. The rule of law is the system under which we operate. Our whole way of life is based on the assumption that the law will be complied with. No political party, no trade union, no individual, can pick and choose between the laws that they wish to obey and those that they wish to ignore. It would be impertinent of me to add to the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on that subject when she opened the debate on Tuesday, save to say that those who deny the rule of law put in peril not only themselves but the whole nation.

9.1 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) for giving me an opportunity to make some brief remarks.

The question of housing benefits was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Mr. Wood). Housing benefits cost the nation £3·9 billion a year—a tenth of the social security budget. There has been an increase of 140 per cent. in real terms in housing benefits over the past 10 years. That is an alarming increase. Why should that increase have taken place when incomes, in real terms, have increased? I suggest that the answer is that 90 per cent. of housing benefit goes to local authorities, and that their expenditure has outstripped income. More and more households now find it impossible to meet their rent and rate demands in full because of the unwarranted increase in local authority expenditure, and a third of all households in the United Kingdom are now eligible for housing benefit. I therefore welcome the housing benefit review.

However, the members of the review team will have an impossible task. They will find that families on low incomes will still require help with rent and rates. They may tinker with the system, but the same 7 million households will still require help with rent and rates, because local authority expenditure is too high and the system of financing local authorities is wrong.

Housing benefit now means that only a third of all local authority electors pay full domestic rates. The ratepayer therefore no longer has control over local authority spending, and, because of the existence of housing benefit, the local authorities no longer have to answer to the ratepayer. It is a vicious circle. As housing benefit increases, the more families are thrown on to housing benefit. The more families are thrown on to benefit, the less answerable financially local authorities become to those who elect them. The social security team will find that the domestic rating system requires a thorough overhaul. That nettle will have to be grasped in the end, because otherwise housing benefit will continue its relentless increase.

9.3 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): We have had a wide-ranging debate on social services and education. Such debates are perhaps more common in the United States than in this country, but they are none the worse for that. Social services and education are the services which are most important to the well-being of our people.

We have heard many good speeches. In particular, I should like to mention the speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt), my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), with his great knowledge of the subject, my hon. Friends the Members for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), and for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) and my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes). The arguments about health and social security have been expressed ably and eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher).

I know that the Secretary of State was to have received a deputation from organisations of the deaf to discuss the need to remove restrictions which discriminate against suitably qualified deaf people training as teachers of the deaf. The meeting was postponed because of today's debate but I am anxious, at the request of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), to get some idea of the Government's stance on this important matter. My right hon. Friend asked me to ask the Secretary of State why there has been so much delay in responding to the case for allowing qualified deaf teachers to teach the deaf. My right hon. Friend would have questioned the Secretary of State himself but has had to leave for the north-east to preside over the annual conference of the north of England regional association for the deaf.

The Queen's Speech contains two sentences on education. The first promises a Bill to give parents the right to exempt their children from corporal punishment. The second gives a puff to the Secretary of State's policies for raising standards in schools. The Corporal Punishment (Exemption) Bill, as it might be called, arises out of the decision of February 1982 by the European Court of Human Rights in the Campbell and Cosans case. The court decided that when a parent holds a conviction against punishment of this type it amounts to a philosophical conviction under the terms of the European Convention on Human Rights. That decision has created quite a problem for the Secretary of State.

It is well known that many Conservative Members strongly believe in the value of corporal punishment. In the consultative document which the Secretary of State issued in July 1983 he said that sanctions, including corporal punishment, form an important aspect of discipline. On the other hand, the decision of the European Court of Human Rights is binding on the United Kingdom.

The Secretary of State has tried desperately to square the circle between his and his party's convictions and the decision of the European Court. Hon. Members will note that the consultative document was produced 17 months after the decision of the European Court of Human Rights. Nor is it that the consultative document was lengthy—it was about four small pages long. Instead of coming out for abolition, the consultative document proposed a compromise. It proposed a system of opt-out for the children of parents who opposed corporal punishment. Subject to that new condition, the decision whether to retain corporal punishment would be left with the school governors. In the consultation exercise that followed, the compromise has been widely condemned. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities called the proposals "unworkable". The Association of County Councils said:

"a system which allowed different sanctions for the same misdemeanour . . . would be difficult to justify and might be regarded by some as lacking morality."

The Campaign for State Education said that the European Court has made the use of corporal punishment

"inequitable, illogical and above all impractical".

The Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association had the gravest reservations—I think rightly—about the wisdom of creating two disciplinary systems. The National Union of Teachers said that the Government's policy was "ill conceived".

Perhaps the most significant comment came from the National Association of Head Teachers. Hon. Members will remember that the consultation document said that the head should have a central role in discipline. Nevertheless, the NAHT warned the Government that there was a basic conflict between their decision not to abolish

"and its decision to retain a sanction which will be implemented on a totally unsatisfactory basis. This is doubly unsatisfactory bearing in mind the fact that the Government, in its own submissions to the European Court, emphasised the wholly undesirable effect that would be in terms of discipline and the administration of schools arising from the right of parents to withdraw their children from this particular sanction".

In view of those devastating criticisms from the overwhelming majority of leading authorities in the education community, will the Secretary of State tell the House how many of the more than 100 organisations and individuals who commented on the consultative document supported an exemptions system? I suspect that the number could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

It is a tragedy that, despite all the objections, the Government have chosen to exclude professional and authoritative advice and to proceed with the unworkable exemption compromise. The Secretary of State has not had the courage—that is not a charge which I usually make against him — to take the only feasible course and abolish corporal punishment. He should have taken the advice of the Society of Education Officers when it said that it would be preferable for the Government to grasp the nettle immediately and issue a policy statement announcing the abolition of corporal punishment in all schools within a specific time.

It is interesting that the Secretary of State for Scotland has taken a much more intelligent and courageous line. In answer to a parliamentary question on 10 July he said that the general aim in Scotland remained the elimination of corporal punishment. Instead of sitting on his hands, he wrote to regional councils urging them to abolish corporal punishment. That did not happen in England.

Although the Bill will cover Scotland, that answer to a question put down by the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) is different in tone and style from a reply given by the Secretary of State for Education and Science. He said:

"Subject to compliance . . . decisions on the use of corporal punishment should be left to the schools themselves." —[*Official Report*, 26 October 1984; Vol. 65, c. *735*.]

The Secretary of State for Scotland said:

"Compliance with the Court's judgment . . . would be best secured by completion of the voluntary process of elmination of corporal punishment in education authority schools which has been the long-standing general aim in Scotland." — [*Official Report*, 10 July 1984; Vol. 63, c. *448*.]

Not for the first time the Scots take a more progressive view of education than the English.

The Secretary of State for Education has ducked the issue. The only sensible, practical and humane policy is to abolish corporal punishment. The Opposition will take every opportunity to convert the exemption Bill into an abolition Bill. If the Secretary of State is not prepared to respect the results of his own consultative exercise and accept amendments to his Bill, we shall have to consider our position on the whole Bill.

Mr. Greenway *rose*——

Mr. Radice: I shall give way, but I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene on this issue.

Mr. Greenway: The hon. Gentleman's words will carry more weight if he suggests feasible and workable alternatives. He has not done that, nor has the Labour party.

Mr. Radice: If the hon. Gentleman were to visit all the other countries of western Europe, none of which allows corporal punishment, he might find out. As those other systems of education have shown, it is possible to run education without corporal punishment. As the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, the best teachers can keep order without needing that deterrent. If there are problems with discipline, the many authorities that have already abolished corporal punishment have found alternative methods for dealing with it. It would not be such a difficult problem as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

The second matter mentioned in the Gracious Speech is educational standards. Hon. Members will remember that on 6 January 1984 in Sheffield, the Secretary of State, with a great fanfare of publicity that was ably organised by his Department, announced a plan for raising pupils' achievements and standards in schools, which he claimed modestly was bold, ambitious and realistic. On behalf of the Opposition, on 20 January, I welcomed some part of that speech in the House and I especially welcomed the Secretary of State's statement that there was a

"basis of quality and past success in"

the state education system, and that

"our schools are offering more pupils a broader education, and a larger proportion of pupils are successful in examinations at 16-plus."

The latest figures from the Department show that that improvement has continued. The facts contradict the

[Mr. Radice]

mindless attacks on the comprehensive schools and the ill-informed abuse of the state system of education which are indulged in too often by Conservative Members, who should know better, and too often by the popular press.

I also welcome the Government's abandonment of the fruitless chasing after educational hares such as vouchers, open enrolment and the return of selection, and I welcome the fact that the Government are addressing themselves to the real issues such as curriculum reform, the examination system of the improvement of teacher quality. We share the objective of raising the level of achievement in schools, although our definition of achievement is much wider than that of the Secretary of State. We wish to raise the level of achievement of all children, not just the few. I warned the Secretary of State——

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman generally tries to be fair. The emphasis of the Government throughout has been on raising the achievements and performance of children of all abilities, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be fair enough to acknowledge that.

Mr. Radice: Yes, I am fair enough to acknowledge that that is the Secretary of State's position. Unfortunately, it is not always the position of Conservative local authorities or, indeed, of members of the Conservative party.

I warned the Secretary of State that he could not hope to be successful unless he was prepared to put his money where his mouth was. I also said that many local education authorities were already experiencing great difficulties in meeting their statutory obligations and I quoted the words of his advisers, Her Majesty's Inspectorate, who said:

"In most secondary schools, existing levels of resources could not now be stretched to meet the demands legitimately placed on them by the community at large, nor could they in all cases maintain the existing basic provision."

In reply—I will be fair to the Secretary of State and use his arguments—the Secretary of State said that not all problems could be solved with money. He also argued that in nearly all authorities there was considerable scope for redeployment. However, he said that where money was needed and where there was no scope for redeployment, he might have to try to convince his colleagues that more must be made available. I remind the Secretary of State of those words, because it is our contention that, 10 months after the launch of the so-called bold, ambitious but realistic plan, his strategy is running into the sand.

There are two reasons for this. The first is due to lack of resources, and the second is the manner in which the Secretary of State has attempted to carry through his plans. I do not propose to pursue the second matter tonight because, as the House knows, we shall have further opportunity to discuss these issues next Wednesday.

This evening, I shall say something about resources. It is ironic that in the same week that the Secretary of State was complacently puffing his policies to raise educational standards, his advisers—the HMI—sounded alarm bells about educational provision in Norfolk, a county that I visited last week, where I saw for myself what was happening. The HMI report said:

"The officers, advisers and teachers are fully conscious of their responsibilities but it is clear that they are all operating in a system that not only has no slack in it, but which is already decidedly over-stretched and showing signs of inadequate levels of provision of staffing and materials."

The report goes on to discuss some of the issues raised by the Secretary of State in January and bluntly warns him:

"If the local education authority is to set out to spread more widely the examples of good practice that exist: to make more equitable the access to educational opportunity of all its pupils and to improve the 5-16 curriculum in order to raise standards in line with national policy intentions"—

in other words, what the Secretary of State is saying—

"the Authority as a whole will need to review its policies for education, including its financial provision and the priority should be given to educational needs in the context of all other calls it has upon its resources."

Unfortunately, the case of Norfolk is not atypical. Its spending is not below the average for the shires. It is spending up to its grant-related expenditure level. What should be worrying the Secretary of State is that if Norfolk follows the advice of the inspectors and gives educational spending priority, it will run up against the Department of Environment targets and penalty system. This point has not just occurred to me, but was mentioned by the chairman of the Norfolk education committee, whom I am sure the Secretary of State knows well.

Norfolk and many other local education authorities are in a "Catch 22" situation. They are told that they will get less from central Government next year. However, they are penalised if they raise locally the resources that they need to tackle the educational problems that have been identified by the HMI. What is happening is that the Secretary of State's plan to raise educational standards is being undermined by the squeeze on resources imposed by the Treasury via the Department of the Environment.

What success is the Secretary of State having in persuading his colleagues to provide the extra resources for education that the HMI says in a number of cases is now urgently needed, or has he allowed his obsession for public spending to overcome his concern for education? We shall learn the harsh truth on Monday afternoon and we shall be able to debate the outcome on Wednesday.

What is clear is that this thin Queen's Speech will do little to improve our welfare and education services. Sadly, we shall be reminded on Monday that, whatever the desires of their respective Ministers, policy on education, health and social security is, in reality, largely determined by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister. We shall also be reminded that, with this Government, it is their ideological commitment to monetarism and cutting public expenditure that shapes policy, not the needs of the people. We believe that as a nation we must change priorities and put the needs of people first. In the coming Session, we shall be arguing that case not just in the House but in the country as a whole.

9.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph): I cannot just enjoy myself by talking about education; I must also try to reply to some of the comments that have been made on health and social security.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) tried as hard as he could to avoid facing the facts, but he could not get away from the two central truths. The Government have shown the priority that they give to the NHS by increased spending. The key figure there is how much it has cost to provide the service. In the past five years the cost of the NHS to the economy as a whole has increased by 17 per cent. — 10 per cent. more than public spending as a whole.

The hon. Gentleman's attachment to input volume figures is just another demonstration of his desire to avoid talking about the real measure of NHS performance—the number of patients treated. He cannot get away from the fact that in 1983—in just one year—the number of patients treated in the NHS increased by as much as during the whole five years of the previous Labour Govermment.

Nor could the hon. Gentleman escape from the formidable speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), who catalogued a list of record services in highly technologically advanced areas as well as in more mundane areas of service that the NHS has been able to clock up.

Moreover, I must remind the House that it is impossible to escape the improvement that the NHS is, with all its blemishes, providing for the public, by pretending that the country, as the hon. Member for Oldham, West most disingenuously pretended, is suffering from a serious decline in health. The present generation, with all the problems that it has, is enjoying longer life expectancy and a record low infant mortality. I do not at all discount some of the real problems that go with poverty, but nevertheless one of the biggest characteristics of current demand on the NHS is that it is seeking to cure people of the problems of affluence.

The hon. Gentleman did not give a convincing case on the NHS, but it was rather better than his attempt to wave away what the Government are doing to improve the position of early leavers from occupational pension schemes. His case was pitiful. The Labour Government gave no statutory protection whatever against inflation to the preserved rights of early leavers in their legislation on occupational schemes. We are putting that failure right.

Yet the hon. Gentleman has the nerve to complain that we put an upper limit of 5 per cent. on the annual increase which has to be made. We have to balance the rights of early leavers against the interests of the schemes and avoid putting excessive burdens on them. More importantly, we think that 5 per cent. is a reasonable ceiling because the Government have not only brought inflation down to 5 per cent., but they intend to bring it down still further. The truth of the matter is that, if the Labour party were ever to regain power, 5 per cent. would be nowhere near enough to cover the inflation which would be the result of its profligate policies.

Mr. Meacher: It is good to hear the Secretary of State returning to those areas where his policies on NHS reorganisation were such a success in 1973-74. Perhaps he will accept that what matters is what money will buy within the NHS and that the 17 per cent. figure which relates to the RPI is not directly relevent to the NHS. That is the simple point that I am making.

All that I said about the 5 per cent. revaluation was that 5 per cent. is less than the other recommended figure of the Occupational Pensions Board, which is 8·5 per cent. The key point that I made, which the right hon. Gentleman has not answered, is that it applies only to existing pensioners and will relate only to benefits paid after next January. Why should millions of pensioners lose out because of the failure to protect them in the past? Is it because the Government are more concerned about the occupational pension scheme than its members?

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman has been let down by his memory. The recommendation of the Occupational Pensions Board was a 5 per cent. limit. It was the TUC that recommended an 8·5 per cent. limit. The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) repeated something that has been said frequently by hon. Members on both sides of the House and that is that there is a virtually insatiable demand on the Health Service, particularly with the technological advances that are constantly being offered to the public. In the NHS there is a sort of rationing by queueing. But, although the waiting lists are still far too high, they are substantially lower than they were when the Conservative party first came to office. In March 1979, the waiting lists amounted to 750,000, but five years later the figure was 690,000. That fall occurred despite the adverse effect of the 1982 NHS strike.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West may be comforted by the knowledge that he was wrong to refer to a fall in the number of home helps. There are now more home helps in action than there were five years ago.

Mr. Ward: I hope that my right hon. Friend will highlight the fact that, despite all that the hon. Member for Oldham, West said, he did not once refer to the need to raise the money from hard-pressed taxpayers and ratepayers. I hope that my right hon. Friend will emphasise the need for budgetary control throughout all the services provided by the Government.

Sir Keith Joseph: I regret to tell the hon. Member for Oldham, West that he is not unique in that regard. All his right hon. and hon. Friends suffer from the same Utopian ignoring of resources.

Mr. Meadowcroft: I was trying to say that the number of home helps had not necessarily been reduced in every case. Of course, because of the rate penalties, some authorities have reduced the number of home helps and they may be the very authorities to have the most serious problems. The point is that when making a financial equation, let alone a social equation, the cost of home helps is minimal compared with the cost of keeping people in institutions. If only on financial and not social grounds, we should be massively increasing the number of home helps.

Sir Keith Joseph: I am almost a fanatical admirer of the home help service and those who work in it, so I agree with the hon. Gentleman; but he is guilty of ignoring constraints. One would have thought that the hon. Gentleman did not think that there were any financial constraints on Government. He spoke as if he was quite unaware of opportunity costs. He catalogued all the areas in which the Government could spend more money and showed a blissful indifference towards the effect on jobs and inflation.

As always, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) made a very interesting speech. He recognised the Government's success in reducing inflation but claimed that it has led to rising unemployment. He also recognised the Government's intent to enable the poor to escape from poverty. Without presenting the Government or management as perfect, I would say that the greatest cause of rising unemployment and continued poverty has been the many trade union leaders who have encouraged their members to price themselves out of jobs. The hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Dormand) has a very nice smile and thinks I am not serious, but I am. Over the years,

[Sir Keith Joseph]

those trade union leaders have obstructed the rising productivity that releases people from poverty. There is no way in which the whole population can escape from poverty except by the community as a whole, including them——

Mr. Dormand: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Keith Joseph: I have a lot of ground to cover so I cannot give way.

Mr. Dormand: Is it in order to accept or refuse an intervention on the basis of one's smile?

In 1979 when this Government came to power the right hon. Gentleman used a word which became a byword outside the House. He said that the new Tory Government and the new freedom from controls would mean that entrepreneurs would be "galvanised" into action. We heard that week in and week out. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that entrepreneurs have been galvanised into action now that 4 million people are unemployed?

Sir Keith Joseph: Yes, but not enough of them. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that his region and others will recover their vitality and full employment without lots of entrepreneurs, he is making a great mistake.

My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley) made a short but splendid speech. She reminded us of the crucial pioneering role in social services of those who lit a candle by identifying social needs and setting out to create voluntary societies. I was the honorary treasurer to the Rev. Mary Webster, of whom my hon. Friend spoke. I pay tribute to people like Mary Webster, Chad Varah of the Samaritans, the remarkable Dame Cicely Saunders of the Hospice movement, the late Megan Du Boisson who founded the Disabled Income Group and Alec Dickson of the community service volunteers. All hon. Members could add to that list of people who have lit a candle by identifying needs to lead the Government. In many cases action has been taken without the Government. I am glad that my hon. Friend spoke in that way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Mr. Wood) spoke with legitimate intensity about the poverty trap and yearned for the introduction of a tax credit scheme, but he was good enough to recognise how expensive and difficult that would be. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) spoke of the housing benefit. My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) congratulated my right hon. Friend on the annual National Health Service report, its presentation and contents, but urged my right hon. Friend to bring down the price of it so that it could be more widely read.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) spoke with strong feeling about the need to consider blind people and their needs. I do not dare comment on the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) about how Scottish funding should be done. I regret that I was not here to listen to all that was said by the hon. Members for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt), for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. McNair-Wilson).

I turn with some pleasure to the subject of education. The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) put to me a question on behalf of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). We are in the midst of consultation on the response that we shall give to recommendations about the teaching of the deaf. The hon. Member for Durham, North mounted his familiar charger and accused me and the Government of not providing enough resources to fulfil the educational objectives that he and the Government share—to raise standards. It is not an indictment——

Mr. Radice: Will the right hon. Gentleman answer my question about the number of organisations that agree with his opt-out scheme for corporal punishment?

Sir Keith Joseph: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will criticise me for it, but I had intended to deal with that matter later. The hon. Gentleman was not the only person who raised that subject. I must also account to several of my hon. Friends.

Together with the hon. Member for Oldham, West the hon. Gentleman lives in a never-never land where there is no shortage of resources. The first duty of any Government is to do their best to ensure that money from the taxpayer and ratepayer is well used, especially when there is as much money as there is available to education authorities. I agree that it is difficult in a period of falling school rolls to cope with diseconomies of scale and provide the services expected. However, some authorities do better than others with the money available. Some allow more waste, some are downright profligate, some are extremely prudent.

This Government did not invent financial prudence. If only previous Labour Governments had been more prudent, we would not be in this plight today. It was the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey)—and I give him credit for it—who attained the largest fall in public spending in one year that has been recorded since the second world war. Who invented cash limits? It was the Labour Government, and quite right they were. They sought to limit public spending. They did not do that very well, and they left the country in a terrible state.

The hon. Gentleman must answer one question. He must tell the House and the country whether he will commit a future Labour Government, if there ever is one, to provide more money for education via the local education authorities.

Mr. Radice: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that his Government are planning to spend in 1985-86 £3·5 million more on defence than on education. The Labour Government spent £600 million more on education than on defence while they were in power. That is the right priority and we will seek to ensure that more is spent on education than on defence. We will try to ensure that local authorities have a properly resourced education service.

Does the Secretary of State believe that Norfolk is a profligate authority?

Sir Keith Joseph: The House will judge whether that was a commitment on behalf of a future Labour Government—I suspect that it was not.

The hon. Gentleman legitimately asked whether I would follow my pledge given at Sheffield 10 months ago to seek more money from my colleagues——

Mr. Radice: What about Norfolk?

Sir Keith Joseph: I shall come to Norfolk. We shall see what happens there as a result of the report.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether I had yet approached my right hon. Friends for additional money because I believed that more was needed. I am not yet convinced that, overall, more is needed. I have said publicly, and I say it again, that if the local education authorities and the teachers' associations manage to agree a settlement under which teachers undertake certain defined responsibilities and accept——

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): A cut in pay.

Sir Keith Joseph: That is the hon. Gentleman's proposition, not mine. If they accept that there shall be a regular professional appraisal of their effectiveness as teachers, if the local education authorities undertake to deploy their teaching force and the training and retraining of that force according to such assessments, and if I judge the agreement to be a good bargain for the children, parents and the public generally, I shall go to my right hon. Friends and seek the necessary money. However, I cannot guarantee the results having discussed the matter with my right hon. Friends. I eagerly await the settlement that I very much hope will emerge.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) chided the Government for omitting to refer to nursery schooling in the Gracious Speech. We do not believe that there are sufficient resources to universalise public money on nursery education and so we concentrate on the compulsory schooling period. However, we are maintaining nursery education on the taxpayer for about 40 per cent. of the children of the relevant age group, especially in areas where social need is greatest.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Ward) urged the Government to take intensely seriously the reactions which he reported to the Warnock committee. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services is coming to the end of consultation on the Warnock committee's report and the Government will come to their decision when the results of the consultation have been studied.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) urged the Government to tackle the problems of matching the teachers of religious education to the needs for them. The Government have not reduced the number of training places for the teachers of RE. The number of places has been maintained, and the difficulty is that we cannot always fill them. Paradoxically, there are unemployed RE teachers who cannot find jobs. We are facing a considerable problem. My hon. Friend knows that the Government are eager to find a way to help improve the position. If he wishes to talk to me on this subject, which I know interests him intensely, I shall always be ready to listen to him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North and my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett), in alliance with the hon. Member for Durham, North denounced me——

Mr. Radice: An unholy alliance.

Sir Keith Joseph: I thought of the term but decided not to use it. My hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman denounced me for the option that I have chosen on corporal punishment as a result of the European Court's decision. I was denounced by my hon. Friends for not allowing some preservation of caning in instances which, in the view of my hon. Friends, thoroughly warrant that punishment. I have been denounced from the Opposition Benches for not going so far as to abolish corporal punishment.

If the Government had chosen another option, I would have been denounced just as fiercely. Whatever option we choose, there will be many who disagree with us. The Government believe that we should leave the decision, with all the attendant untidiness and untidy consequences, to parents, teachers and governing bodies. The House will have a chance to consider this policy when we come to legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage rightly emphasised the need for technological training.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Keith Joseph: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me for not giving way. I have much ground still to cover.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North came south of the border to denounce the behaviour of some teachers. I agree with what he said. I have seen reports to the effect that many schools were closed and others disrupted as ILEA teachers participated in the day of action, which, I understand, was supported by NALGO, TGWU, NUPE and the inner London branch of the NUT, to protest against the Government's plans for rate capping and the abolition of the GLC. I am sad to learn that teachers are thus prepared to damage the service that they claim to support—all the more so because ILEA is not to be abolished under the Government's plans but is merely to be made more directly accountable to the ratepayers who foot its bills.

Recently, Mrs. Morrell, the leader of ILEA, made some strange statements to the ILEA education committee in which she sought to denounce the Government on a wide range of issues. She has asked to see me to discuss two of her criticisms, and I hope to clarify them then. I shall not let the more serious points rest unanswered in the meantime. First, Mrs. Morrell sought to give the impression that the requirement in the paving Act to seek ministerial consent for contracts valued at more than £100,000 and for all lettings of school facilities to outside groups has imposed a serious burden on ILEA. The facts are that general consents were issued on 2 August in respect of most transactions involving ILEA, and further general consents were issued on 31 October covering lettings. I understand that ILEA obtains its supplies of goods, materials and equipment generally from the GLC supplies division and that there is no requirement to seek approval on its transactions with the supplies division. The Government cannot apply a general consent to contracts that are placed by the GLC supplies division with outside suppliers, most of which are not placed exclusively for ILEA.

Secondly, Mrs. Morrell has claimed that I have, without consultation or justification, introduced an administrative memorandum requiring that any proposal for a new nursery class must receive the formal permission of the holder of my office. The facts are that ILEA officers saw the memorandum in draft; the interpretation of the legal decision regarding the addition of nursery classes to private schools is generally accepted by LEAs — although an authoritative decision can be given only by the

[Sir Keith Joseph]

courts—and the only proposals that need to be seen by the holder of my office are those that attract statutory objections or involve a voluntary school.

Thirdly, Mrs. Morrell has accused me of casting a slur on the efforts of London children and their teachers when I said that ILEA expenditure was out of proportion to the results achieved for the children. I noted with interest that she sought to rebut my statement by referring to the fact that ILEA examination results were the best since 1978. I readily grant that point. ILEA's actual examination results are close to those predicted by statistical analysis of the social and economic characteristics of the inner London education area. Mrs. Morrell does not seem to understand that my comment is not so much on the quality of the education in ILEA, although I certainly share with ILEA the aim to improve it, but on the amount of money spent by the authority in relation to those results. I expressed a strong doubt that the results would have been any the worse if the expenditure had been much less.

Mr. Spearing: What about those not taking exams?

Sir Keith Joseph: Alas, a very large proportion does not take exams in other parts of the country, too. *[Interruption.]* No; it is a question of the relevance of the curriculum, the effectiveness of the teachers, and the support from the home.

Fourthly, there is the matter of the underspend of £24 million in 1983-84. Mrs. Morrell has now explained the elements that go to make up the underspend, as if that excused it. The fact is that the budget is estimated net — expenditure minus income — and there was an overestimate of £24 million.

Finally, Mrs. Morrell asked for the plans to evict ILEA from county hall to be scrapped. There are no such plans. Mrs. Morrell has said that ILEA's accommodation requirements are such that they could occupy a large proportion of county hall. I look forward to hearing about that in more detail when Mrs. Morrell comes to see me.

I pay tribute to the sheer difficulty of being an effective teacher. Teaching is a demanding job.

I have read the claims of the teachers' unions for pay increases for April 1985 presented to the Burnham committee on 1 November. It is quite clear to me that the expectations of the teachers' unions are entirely unrealistic as, indeed, they were last year. As a nation, there must be limits to what we can afford to spend on public services, including education. This Government have fought and won two elections on a clear commitment to restrain public spending, so freeing a greater proportion of national effort for the manufacturing and trading sector on which ultimately economic health, jobs and all the nation's services, social and public, must depend. That remains our position.

I must therefore ask for realism among those who would seek to set public service pay by comparisons. Let us suppose that any particular group managed to increase the pay of its members in relation to some recent or long-past comparison study. Does that group think that every other group would fail to try to follow suit? There would be a whirlwind of competing claims leading to rocketing inflation and increasing unemployment.

That is why I believe that the teachers are doing themselves a great injustice in putting forward a totally unrealistic set of claims, unwelcome as that may be to them. The answer must be that pay, including even that of teachers, must be settled principally by reference to what can be afforded for the service in question, informed by considerations—in relation to the necessary qualities —of recruitment, retention and motivation.

That is not to say that I regard the present teachers' pay arrangements as satisfactory. I hanker after a more relevant relationship between pay and performance— *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Oldham, West thinks that that is funny. The interests of the children require that teachers should be encouraged to be effective. Some teachers deserve more pay because they are more effective in the classroom. That is why I spoke with such concern about the outcome of the negotiation which is shortly to be resumed between the local education authorities and the teachers' unions in the working party established under the aegis of the Burnham primary and secondary committee.

I hope for a successful outcome to the deliberations of that committee, but I must recognise that there are many obstacles to be overcome. Any new arrangements for teachers' pay and professional commitment will have to satisfy stringent tests as to acceptability and affordability. On acceptability there is the prior question of whether teachers' employers — chiefly the local education authorities, which run the maintained school system— and the holder of my office jointly consider that the proposed changes would produce a worthwhile improvement in the delivery of the curriculum in schools. We must all return to that test as the essential baseline for our judgment.

Linked with that is whether the profession might share our views. As yet I do not know the answer which the teacher associations might offer to such a question. We must await the outcome of continuing discussions with the teacher associations.

Affordability is the second test—whether the ideas now in circulation can be refined to produce a package which will substantially benefit the education of our children, and which should therefore be regarded as a reasonable claim on scarce public resources. Again, I have no ready answers to that. The next meeting of the relevant working party of the Burnham committee is on 15 November. I shall not try to anticipate the outcome. Equally, I recognise that the employer and teacher associations may well require more time to consider whether they can agree on a package for consideration by the Government in due course. Mr. Teacher — *[Laughter.]* I do not think, Mr. Speaker, that you will be insulted by that mistake. There is, Mr. Speaker, the very important question of the deployment of teachers.

Recently the Department has set out a range of policies for raising standards in schools, as the hon. Member for Durham, North reminded us. Some of those policies may be more demanding of teacher time or may require a different emphasis in the use that schools make of the teacher time now available to them. Those issues were addressed in the discussion paper, "Schoolteacher Numbers and Deployment in the Longer Term" that we issued in September. I shall be discussing that paper with the representatives of local authorities and look forward to receiving their and other views on it.

In the paper, we identified a number of claims on teacher time in connection with in-service training, the preparation of the curriculum in secondary schools——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Wheelwright Sixth Form College, Dewsbury

10 pm

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Mr. John Whitfield (Dewsbury): The people of Dewsbury were reassured to note from the Gracious Speech on Tuesday that the

"Government will continue to develop policies to raise educational standards".

However, the decision by the Kirklees metropolitan district council education authority to remove completely school-based sixth form education from non-Roman Catholic children in Dewsbury can only be construed as an attempt to reduce education standards in my constituency. The local education authority would no doubt deny that that was its intention, but what are its reasons for wishing to close the Wheelwright college and to push all would-be sixth form children in the area into a further education establishment known as the Dewsbury and Batley technical and art college — DABTAC for short — which it intends to redesignate as a tertiary college?

The final paragraph of the so-called consultative document of February 1984, which was entitled "Post 16 Education in Dewsbury", sums up the local education authority's case. It claimed that the tertiary college would be a new institution. The quality and commitment of the existing staff, the adoption of the best practices of the present institutions and the comparatively minor capital expenditure could, claims the LEA—obviously it is not sure — create a good tertiary college and thereby significantly enhance the educational opportunities available to all. In fact, the proposed tertiary college would not be a new institution. In reality, it would be an extended version of DABTAC, using the same site and a few additional Victorian buildings in Halifax road, Dewsbury, in what is already a highly congested area.

The present attractive and comparatively modern buildings of the Wheelwright college on the other side of town would be abandoned. The commitment of the Wheelwright staff has already been severely damaged, not to say undermined, by the manner in which the notice under section 12 of the Education Act 1980 was drawn up, containing as it did the detail of transitional arrangements, and in particular the transference of students from Wheelwright to DABTAC. It was surely inappropriate to refer to transitional arrangements when a decision on a closure had not yet been confirmed by the Secretary of State. The closure was not in any event to take place until 1987.

To set out such arrangements without any consultation with the staff concerned was a wholly reprehensible act and can only have been designed to undermine the future viability of Wheelwright college, but that policy had started back in 1980.

The phrase "comparatively minor capital expenditure" is one that the Minister might well be advised to beware of. How often have we heard that expression and been attracted by the superficial simplicity of the claim that big is always beautiful? If only the Government had resisted such lures when reorganising the local authorities in 1974, the present Parliament would not have been faced with the uphill task of abolishing the metropolitan counties.

[Mr. John Whitfield]

Wheelright college was opened in September 1974 as a result of one of the last major decisions of the former county borough of Dewsbury. In its reorganisation of secondary education in the town on comprehensive lines, a system of four high schools for children aged 12 to 16 and one sixth form college were established. It was always envisaged that post-16 education would be best provided by a complementary service from the new Wheelwright college, on the one hand, and the further education establishment, DABTAC, on the other.

The scheme was approved by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who was at that time the Secretary of State for Education and Science. As part of the reorganisation, the famous old Wheelwright grammar school ceased to exist. The college was set up only 10 years ago specifically to provide sixth form education for up to 300 children, for most of whom there was to be no other such opportunity. In spite of falling general school rolls and the fact that the St. John Fisher Roman Catholic high school established its own sixth form in 1977, Wheelwright college has prospered, maintaining a roll of about 250 students.

However, not content with what had been done in Dewsbury in 1974, the new education authority in Kirklees has, since 1977, been examining the whole educational provision in north-east Kirklees. From 1980 the authority allowed rumours to circulate that it was considering closing Wheelwright college. There is no doubt that the insidious rumours which were allowed to circulate well in advance of the so-called consultation process which began at the beginning of this year caused the rolls to fall from 294 students in 1981 to 220 this year. Even so, Wheelwright college is still by far the largest unit providing sixth form education in north Kirklees.

I hope that it is not presumptuous of me to expect that the Minister may well say that the Secretary of State is now exercising a quasi-judicial role in deciding whether to confirm the section 12 notice of intention to withdraw support from Wheelwright which was issued by the LEA on 20 September.

I wish to put a direct question to the Minister: where do he and his Department stand on the provision of school-based sixth form education? Are they for it or against it? I sincerely hope that the Minister will assure me that the Government would never be content to see all 16-plus education in an area confined solely to establishments of further education. Such would be the situation for all children in Dewsbury, except Roman Catholics, if Wheelwright college were to close. In Kirklees such a move would have particulrly sinister implications, because the education authority recently rejected an offer of £2 million made to Dewsbury high schools under the Government's training and vocational education initiative on the ground that the money was soiled with the hands of the Manpower Services Commission and that therefore it was not wanted.

It has to be admitted that sixth form education in north Kirklees is in a somewhat jumbled state. In addition to the St. John Fisher Roman Catholic high school, there are other sixth forms at Heckmondwike grammar school, which is shortly to close, at Mirfield high school. at Batley boys high school and Howden Clough girls high school. The largest of those sixth forms has no more than 120 students. What can be the possible educational logic behind the closure of a purpose-created sixth form college, leaving behind other much smaller individual sixth forms? No doubt they will be knocked on the head one by one on the grounds of their small size and alleged unviability as stage two of the insidious Socialist grand plan for more social engineering in Kirklees.

Even today, Wheelwright college, which caters for up to 300 pupils, is far more viable than any of the surrounding high school sixth forms. With an assured future it would be more than capable of providing increased facilities, if required, for sixth form education in north Kirklees if the Secretary of State believes—as I am sure he does—in maintaining education standards and choice.

The parents of Dewsbury are making their views known in no uncertain way. Already more than 8,000 have signed a petition which has been organised by the Wheelwright students council. Moreover, more than 1,000 parents have put together and signed individual letters of objection to the section 12 notice. In the time-honoured anti-democratic Socialist manner, however, staff employed by the local education authority have been gagged when it comes to making their views about what is educationally best known to the Secretary of State. The governing bodies of the four feeder high schools in Dewsbury have been fixed with political placemen by the Left-wing caucus on the local education authority which is determined to close Wheelwright college in spite of all the opposition.

We are not here concerned with a group of neighbouring schools that, due to falling rolls, cannot sustain 16-plus education in each of their establishments. In 1974, a sensible scheme was set up in Dewsbury. It was approved by the then Secretary of State for Education and Science. Four high schools, including the former Wheelwright grammar school, ceased to maintain their own sixth forms and the Wheelwright college was established to provide school-based sixth form education for the children of Dewsbury. At that time, the St. John Fisher Roman Catholic school did not have its own sixth form. More recently, it has obtained approval for the establishment of one. In the surrounding areas of Mirfield, Heckmondwike and Batley the high schools have, perhaps with some difficulty, maintained their sixth forms. When considering the many objections that are being put to him, my right hon. Friend might feel that he must take into account the future viability of some of these separate sixth forms.

In pursuit of its dogmatic egalitarian ends, the Left-wing caucus controlling Kirklees recently embarked on a mockery of a consultation process. The LEA's consultation document stated in the first sentence of the introductory paragraph that it had concluded that the educational interests of the people in Dewsbury and the surrounding areas would be best served by the establishment of a tertiary college in Dewsbury which would replace DABTAC and Wheelwright college. In that context it issued the consultation document and, almost as an afterthought, said that its publication did not mean that a decision had already been reached. It was no surprise to the people of Dewsbury that, in spite of overwhelming opposition to the proposal which was expressed during the consultation period, the LEA resolved in September to withdraw support from Wheelwright college. It therefore embarked on the process to close down probably the one really viable sixth form in the area—the only sixth form available to the 40,000 non-Roman Catholic residents of Dewsbury.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister confirm that the principles set out in Department of Education and Science circular 4/82 of 8 June 1982 still apply? Will he confirm that the pattern of education chosen in an area should maintain and, where possible, improve educational opportunity for people aged 11 to 19 in all ranges of ability? Will he confirm that parental choice and the need to maintain what is best and has proved its worth in the existing system of secondary education in the area are still relevant factors? Will he confirm that academic performance is still a major factor in defining the work of any school that it is proposed to close?

The objections which will in due course be submitted to the Secretary of State will show that Wheelwright college has a sustained record of success in the provision of sixth form education. They will reveal that it has proved its worth under the existing arrangements, that it can continue to do so, and that it can easily be increased in size if that is required. Will the Minister confirm tonight that, provided the Secretary of State is satisfied that that is so, the prima facie case for the retention of the college can be displaced only by compelling educational reasons? I can tell him now that no such reasons exist.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mr. Whitfield) on obtaining the Adjournment debate about the future of Wheelwright sixth form college in his constituency. I am pleased to be able to reply to him. He spoke tonight about a subject which is of immediate interest in his constituency, but which is nevertheless representative of an issue that faces most areas as the school population declines. In doing so, he has shown the active and diligent way in which he represents his constituents' interests.

My hon. Friend spoke of the proposal by the Kirklees local education authority to reorganise provision for the education of 16 to 19-year-olds in Dewsbury in a tertiary college, and to close the Wheelwright sixth form college as part of that proposal. I shall come to that in a moment, but, before I do so, there are a number of important educational and financial considerations that underlie the closure of any school which must be considered. In the limited time available to me, I shall try to say something about them and to outline the particular considerations that apply to secondary education and especially to education for 16 to 19-year-olds.

With regard to Wheelwright college, my hon. Friend will have noted that I was careful to refer to the local education authority's proposal to close it. There are detailed procedures enshrined in law that must be observed before any school can be closed — and a sixth form college is a school within the legal definition. In the present case, those legal procedures have already been set in hand, and I shall need, therefore, to be circumspect in what I say in relation to the merits of the proposals. I am sure that my hon. Friend will appreciate why that is so. Before I go further, I should perhaps outline the statutory procedures that are set out in section 12 of the Education Act 1980. When a local education authority decides that it wishes to cease to maintain a school, it must publish locally notices of what it is proposing and submit the proposals to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. There then follows a two-month period when objections may be submitted to the local education authority. Those who have a statutory right to object are defined in the Act as 10 or more local government electors, the governors of any voluntary school and any local education authority that might be affected by the proposals.

If there are objections, the authority must send them to my right hon. Friend within one month of the expiry of the notices with its observations, and my right hon. Friend must then consider the proposals on their merits and make his decision accordingly. If there are no objections — that is not the case in Dewsbury — the authority may in the case of county schools determine to implement the proposals without reference to my right hon. Friend unless he has informed the authority that he wishes to decide the proposals irrespective of whether objections have been made. In the case of Wheelwright college, he did in fact call in the proposals, as he normally does where a change is proposed in the pattern of provision for 16 to 19-year-olds.

I have taken careful note of all that has been said tonight about the proposals for Wheelwright college—as indeed I have of my hon. Friend's previous correspondence with me on this matter and of correspondence from others. But it would not be right for me to make any comment about its future at the moment. Proposals under section 12 to cease to maintain the college were published on 20 September. We are therefore still in the two-month period in which objections may be lodged. My right hon. Friend will hear from the local education authority before Christmas of any objections submitted and of the authority's observations on those objections. He will then need to consider all that has been said and to act in a quasi-judicial role. That is why I must take care tonight that I do not say anything which would prejudice my right hon. Friend's decision.

Naturally, when my right hon. Friend considers proposals before him, he must take account of all the relevant factors. Those factors include the educational and financial merits of the proposals, the statutory objections and the local education authority's comments upon them; and his general policies on education as set out for instance in circulars 2/80, 2/81 and 4/82. In addition, representations are sometimes made for the proposals, and those, too, would be taken into account. I stress that my right hon. Friend's decision is taken only after the most careful consideration of all the relevant issues.

Perhaps I should say a word or two about the general considerations that arise in relation to 16 to 19 education. There are, of course, several different options available to a local education authority. They include sixth forms in secondary schools; co-operative arrangements between two or more schools at sixth form level, with or without the involvement of a further education college ; or a break at 16 with sixth form colleges such as Wheelwright; or with tertiary colleges such as the Kirklees local education authority has in mind here.

Authorities may decide to adopt any of those patterns throughout their area, or they may choose to provide varying patterns of provision in different areas. All that is a matter for local decision within the statutory framework which I have already described. It is for local education authorities, in consultation with the governors in the case of voluntary-aided and special agreement schools, to decide what pattern best suits their local circumstances and the preferences of parents. My right hon. Friend has made clear his belief that no pattern has in itself overriding advantages or disadvantages of principle; and that he sees no inherent merit in authorities adopting a uniform pattern

[Mr. Bob Dunn]

for the whole of their area. What is important is that whatever pattern is chosen should maintain, and where possible improve, educational opportunities for the whole range of ability. My right hon. Friend also expects local education authorities to give the most careful consideration to the need to retain what is best and has proved its worth in their existing system of secondary education.

Finally, I repeat that the statutory period for the submission of objections to the proposals has not yet closed. When it does, the proposals will come before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for decision. I am, of course, meeting my hon. Friend with a deputation from Dewsbury on 4 December. I assure him and his constituents that all their arguments will be carefully considered by my right hon. Friend, along with the other considerations that arise, before he reaches his decision. At this stage, it would not be right for me to offer an opinion in case I should be thought to be prejudicing that decision.

I end by congratulating my hon. Friend once again on his success in obtaining this debate, and on placing on record so carefully his views about this proposal.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 9 November 1984

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

National Health Service (North Staffordshire)

9.34 am

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): To the honourable Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Parliament assembled, the petition of North Staffordshire showeth

That we, the undersigned, wish to express our concern at the cut that is taking place in the Health Service and the reduction in the level and standards of health care provided for the people of North Staffordshire.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House urges the Secretary of State for Health and Social Services to urge the chairman and members of the District Health Authority to use every means in their power to resist the cuts in all parts of health care imposed by the Government, and to prevent any further closure of hospitals, clinics or other Health Service facilities. And that it calls on all members of the public to join the campaign to defend the National Health Service.

No fewer than 18,500 people in North Staffordshire are deeply concerned about this issue and hope that full account will be taken of this petition.

To lie upon the Table.

BILL PRESENTED

CIVIL AVIATION

Mr. Secretary Ridley, supported by Mr. Secretary Brittan, Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. Secretary Jenkin, Mr. John Moore and Mr. Michael Spicer, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to the imposition of limits on aircraft movements at aerodromes designated by the Secretary of State, including provision with respect to the functions of the British Airports Authority in connection with any such limits; to make further provision for securing the most effective use of aerodromes; and to make provision for reducing the indebtedness of the Civil Aviation Authority in connection with the disposal of certain aerodromes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 8].

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[FOURTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [6 November].

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament—*[Sir Paul Bryan.]*

Question again proposed.

Foreign Affairs and Overseas Development

9.36 am

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): As we start the first foreign affairs debate of the Session today, the whole House is bound to be aware of the extent to which the world scene is overshadowed by two tragic events—in Ethiopia and in India.

The first dark shadow over our debate is cast by the fate of hundreds of thousands of people who have died, or are near to death, as a consequence of the catastrophic drought in Ethiopia, and, alas, in other parts of Africa. During the past two years we have made available almost £13 million worth of food aid and disaster relief supplies to Ethiopia. We have taken the lead in the Community to expand and speed up the relief effort. Our prompt response has been followed by many countries in East and West; and there has rightly been a surge of sympathy and support from all over the country.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will deal with this major issue in more detail at the end of the debate. I should like to assure the House simply that famine relief in Ethiopia and Africa generally is, and will remain, an urgent priority for the Government.

Many hon. Members have already expressed their feelings at the more personal tragic event — the senseless, cowardly assassination of the Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. The House will know that Her Majesty's Government and the British people totally condemn the tiny minority of people here who have sought to exploit, and—still more shocking—to rejoice at, this evil deed.

I had the privilege just a year ago of seeing Mrs. Gandhi at work in her own country. That was during her skilful and engaging chairmanship of last year's highly successful Commonwealth Heads of Government conference in New Delhi. I can add my own testimony and deep regret that Mrs. Gandhi's death has deprived India of a great leader and the Commonwealth of a far-sighted world statesman. We share the grief of all true friends of India. We extend our earnest good wishes and our full support to her son as he takes on his new responsibilities.

Mrs. Gandhi's death by assassination is the latest in a world-wide chronicle of terrorism. The outrage at

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

Brighton is fresh in our minds. Few countries have escaped this scourge. Innocent people pay the price of such wanton attacks on civilised society. The most disturbing feature has been the readiness of some Governments to instigate and support terrorism. By our actions, we have made it plain that we will not tolerate the abuse for this purpose of diplomatic missions in Britain, but the threat will be checked only if the major countries are prepared to take strong measures, and, above all, to take those measures together. We have taken the lead in insisting on practical, concerted action. We shall continue to work for vigorous steps to combat terrorism around the world.

I intend to concentrate most of my remarks on the key international issues of East-West relations, developments in Europe and in the middle east. First, I should like to deal briefly with several other topics that are mentioned in the Gracious Speech.

I begin with Gibraltar, about which I have had a number of discussions with the Spanish Foreign Minister. I expect to meet him again quite shortly. As the Gracious Speech makes clear, these discussions have focused upon the implementation of the Lisbon statement. As the House knows, that statement provides for the lifting of restrictions on communications between Spain and Gibraltar, and for the start of negotiations with Spain aimed at overcoming all the differences between us over Gibraltar.

In that statement, Her Majesty's Government clearly reaffirmed our commitment to honour the wishes of the Gibraltar people about their future. I have no doubt that the Lisbon statement offers the best framework for managing our differences with Spain over Gibraltar. We want to see it put into effect at an early date.

In September, I attended the meeting in San Jose of the Foreign Ministers of the Community, together with Spain and Portugal, and the Foreign Ministers of nine central and Latin American countries. The meeting underlined Europe's determination to help in the urgent task of promoting stability and political development in central America.

I made it plain that the United Kingdom, together with her European Community partners, is giving its wholehearted support to the Contadora process. We believe that that process offers the best hope for achieving stability, prosperity and democracy in that part of the world. To demonstrate our practical support for that process, the Community Foreign Ministers expressed their willingness to give additional aid to the region. The roots of the conflict are indigenous to central America, but they have been exploited by those who have little interest in the establishment of truly democratic government.

In recent days there have been reports of further arms supplies to Nicaragua. We share the concern that has been widely expressed about the possibility that this shipment included high-performance fighter aircraft. It is an integral part of the Contadora proposals that armaments should be scaled down and not built up. It would be most regrettable if any steps were taken at this stage to introduce weapons systems that would inevitably be seen as a threat to other countries in the region, and that would set back the hopes of a successful outcome to the Contadora negotiations. The situation is one that in our view calls for the greatest possible restraint on all sides.

We were glad to welcome El Salvador's return to democracy, but in Nicaragua we became increasingly concerned about the conditions for the election campaign. Many hon. Members will have seen reports that, over a period of many months, the opposition parties were effectively intimidated and often physically harassed by Sandinista mobs — "divine mobs", as they were described by the Nicaraguan Minister of the Interior. As a result, both main opposition parties decided to withdraw from the election. In those circumstances, there was no possibility of a genuinely free and fair contest, however orderly the polling may have appeared to visitors who spent the last few days in Nicaragua.

In our considered judgment—a view shared by the great majority of our European partners—it would have been quite wrong to send official observers to watch the final moments of an election of which the earlier stages were so fundamentally flawed.

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): The right hon. and learned Gentleman will have seen that his French colleague, M. Cheysson, told the Assembly in France two days ago that he regarded the elections as correct and as a contribution to peace in central America. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree with that?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have expressed my view about the elections already. There is a difference between the conduct of the elections on the day and the circumstances and background in which those elections have to be conducted in the weeks and months before election day. One has to take acount of such matters as the extent to which the media are controlled, the extent to which intimidation takes place, and the extent to which other elements of the state have a serious impact. In our view, all these things combined to create a sitation in which free and fair elections could not be regarded as having taken place. In El Salvador, a real transfer of power took place; but that was not the position in Nicaragua.

Let me now turn to southern Africa. Some new developments there have been encouraging. We welcome the Lusaka agreement on troop withdrawals from Angola, the Nkomati accord between South Africa and Mozambique and the more recent moves towards a ceasefire in Mozambique.

There seems, too, to be a greater prospect of progress now over Namibia. The diplomatic efforts undertaken by the United States and the direct contacts between those directly involved appear to be making headway. We remain firmly committed to early implementation of Security Council resolution 435. We shall continue to lend our help and support to the negotiations.

However, once again, events inside South Africa have caused concern on both sides of the House. The incident at our Durban consulate, and the South African Government's refusal to return the four men to face charges in the Coventry court, show that the South African Government's own policies can be a major obstacle to stable relations. We wholly reject the idea of any linkage between these two problems.

We have already condemned the South African breach of faith over the Coventry four. The responsibility of the South African Government to bring them to justice is clear cut. The situation in the Durban consulate was not of our making. I will not deny that it faces us with a complex and delicate legal and humanitarian problem, but I am sure that

I have the support of the House in seeking, so far as we properly can, to take account of the humanitarian considerations.

The Gracious Speech reaffirmed our commitment to the Falkland Islands. We welcome Argentina's return to democracy, but last week's debate in the United Nations General Assembly showed that Argentina's failure to take any account of the wishes of the islanders is still a fundamental obstacle to any solution. The Argentine resolution insisted on the resumption of negotiations, aimed at transferring sovereignty, as if the brutal invasion of the islands had never taken place. I am pleased that the support for our position in the United Nations remained as firm as last year.

I can assure the House that we shall continue to protect the islanders' right to live peacefully under a Government of their own choosing. We are not prepared to discuss sovereignty over the islands, but we have made sustained and carefully prepared efforts to improve our bilateral relations with Argentina, and we shall persevere in that. We remain convinced that the only effective and realistic way forward is to tackle practical issues step by step.

I turn now to a development that many Members on both sides of the House have been kind enough to describe as a considerable achievement for British diplomacy. I refer, of course, to Hong Kong. The right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) described our recent exchange on the subject as a "feast of love." I am still recovering from the indigestion caused by those unusually honeyed words.

The draft agreement that was initialled on 26 September was the fruit of long negotiations. The people of Hong Kong are now expressing their views on that agreement, and the assessment office is now receiving and collating those views. The report of this office, together with that of the independent monitoring team, will be laid before the House. I know that hon. Members will want to study them carefully so that at an early opportunity we can have a thorough debate on the draft agreement, but I am already confident that we have secured an agreement that the Government can strongly commend to the people of Hong Kong and to Parliament.

I shall now move to the broader international issues of profound concern to the House. From the moment when I became Foreign Secretary, I have never had any doubt that the greatest and most important challenge that faces the foreign policy makers of the West is to find a way of establishing stable, peaceful relations with the nations of Eastern Europe. That was the principal foreign policy task that the Prime Minister and I set ourselves when this Government were returned to power.

There is now widespread agreement among the Western allies, in both north America and Europe, about the philosophy of the Western approach. Some right hon. and hon. Members may already have studied an important speech made by Secretary of State George Shultz on 18 October in Los Angeles. It deserves study in full, but two points were well orated—that

"In the nuclear age we need to maintain a relationship with the Soviet Union"

and that

"negotiation without strength cannot bring benefits. Strength alone will never achieve a durable peace".

Since that speech was made, the people of the United States have re-elected President Reagan and Vice-President Bush with an overwhelming majority. We congratulate them on a signal victory and wish them well in their second term of office. We look forward to the same spirit of co-operation and shared values that characterised their first four years. President Reagan's statements of policy have been fully in tune with those of the wider Alliance. For example, in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly on 24 September he made very clear his wish for greater understanding between the United States and the Soviet Union and for progress on arms control. This week after his re-election he has reaffirmed that message—and this week there can be no doubt that President Reagan spoke for the American people.

I was able to explore the call for a fresh start contained in President Reagan's speech when I met Mr. Gromyko a few days later, for the fourth time this year, in New York. On every occasion of that kind, and indeed at my meeting in July with President Chernenko alongside Mr. Gromyko, I have been struck not so much by the differences between us, although they are, of course, real and substantial, as by the similarity of what we say are the basic aims of our people. This similarity in what we say is reflected in both sides' stated desire to break the spiral of the arms race, in both sides' declared and shared aim of better relations between East and West—often, indeed, in apparently similar words and phrases. Time and again, I have found that we are separated not so much by the words, that we use as by the meaning that we attach to them.

I believe that it must be our task to try to bridge that gap and to reconcile in a realistic and practical way our differing approaches with our common underlying interest in the safety and security of the world. That is why I am glad that Mr. Gromyko has accepted my invitation to make a return visit to London in 1985. That is also why I welcome the opportunity of discussions with Mr. Gorbachev, who will be here in London next month on a parliamentary visit organised by the British group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. He will be the most senior Soviet Politburo member to come to Britain for many years and we shall use these discussions to impress upon the Soviet leaders the sincerity and commitment of the Western nations to the search for peace and stable relations. I shall convey the same message in the eastern European capitals which I plan to visit in the course of the next 12 months.

The West's prime objective is, and will remain, genuine, balanced and verifiable measures of arms control. I am sure that the House agrees that the whole world would applaud a positive and practical Soviet determination to pursue the same objective. The Leader of the Opposition and the right hon. Member for Leeds, East are shortly to visit Moscow. I hope that when they go there they will convey the same message. I hope, too, that they will discard the obsession, which seems to be recently acquired in the case of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East, with the idea of Britain acting unilaterally. I must tell them that this would emasculate the protection offered by the Alliance not just to Britain but to our neighbours and would secure nothing in the way of progress towards genuine and balanced arms control.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my right hon. and learned Friend suggest to the Opposition and make it clear to Mr. Gorbachev that this country hopes not merely for shared good intentions between the West and the Soviet Union but for evident and practical measures to show that the Soviets themselves desire a

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reduction of tension—for instance, by withdrawing their troops from Aghanistan and encouraging free trade unions in Poland?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree with my hon. Friend; and I have raised both those points in earlier discussions with the Soviet Union. We need to move to practical measures of that kind. Indeed, in the whole arms control debate we need practical measures. The Soviet Union in its present tone tends to say that it looks to the West for deeds rather than words in relation to arms control. I am anxious to move from shared statements of objectives and shared identification of the arms control menu to find practical ways of making headway in the much harder but very important business of arms control.

I hope that before the right hon. Member for Leeds, East and his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition go to Moscow they will give some consideration to the views of their Socialist colleagues in Europe. President Mitterrand, for example, does not believe that a policy of unilateral disarmament would advance the cause of peace. Speaking, I believe, to the Bundestag, he said:

"Our analysis and our conviction, those of France, are that the nuclear weapon, the instrument of deterrence, whether one likes or deplores it, remains the guarantee of peace".

The Socialist leaders of opinion in the rest of Europe recognise that we have to live with the realities of the world as it is, and it is high time the right hon. and hon. Members opposite who take a different view learned the same lesson.

The pursuit of dialogue with the East does not do away with the need for effective defence of the West. The Government are fully committed to ensuring NATO's continuing effectiveness as a defensive alliance. I emphasise the word "defence". Alliance leaders stated unequivocally in Bonn in 1982 that we shall never be the first to use force, and that remains our position. We threaten no one. For the continuing strength and cohesion of the Alliance, we owe a great debt of gratitude to Joseph Luns, who spoke and worked fearlessly for the causes in which he believes. To succeed him, the allies are fortunate in having secured the services of a distinguished former holder of my office, Lord Carrington. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House welcome his appointment. The Government will give him and through him the Alliance, our full support.

I sometimes detect a tendency, not so much in this House as on the part of some of our European partners, to talk as though security among Europeans could be brought about by economic and political means alone and to take for granted the defence of Europe. The reality, of course, is that the security of Europe, and thus the contribution made by member states to the defence of Europe, is an indispensable element of European co-operation as a whole. In this respect, it cannot be said too often that Britain's contribution is pre-eminent.

I am glad to say that that point was plainly recognised by our partners at the 30th anniversary meeting of the Western European Union which I attended, together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, in Rome two weeks ago. It was one of our allies who pointed out there that the most important aspect of the original WEU treaty is the continuing commitment by the United Kingdom to maintain a very substantial force of British troops and airmen on the mainland of Europe.

The meeting in Rome was of more than a commemorative nature. We in Europe must share the common burden in a way that matches our political and economic strength. We have already done more than many realise. Since 1971, the European share of spending in the Alliance has increased by almost a quarter. Under this Government, the record of the United Kingdom has been particularly good, but the European countries can improve their performance still further. Closer co-operation and greater concentration on value for money can make more effective use of the resources available to us. I believe that the Western European Union can act as a ginger group to maintain what President Eisenhower once described as

"a core of unity at the heart of NATO".

I believe that the WEU playing that role will help to forestall any anxieties that the super-powers may be designing a defence system for a world fit only for super-powers to live in. This relaunching of the WEU comes at the right time, and we shall give it our full support.

Referring to the Community, I should like to stress once again that, following the Fontainebleau agreement, we now have a sound and durable basis for its financial arrangements. We had to fight hard to get it — for Britain, but, as our partners increasingly recognise, for Europe, too.

There are three essential points on which agreement has been reached: first, that the United Kingdom should have a lasting correction of its budget contribution; secondly, that the Community must implement a more rigorous approach to sound financial management; and, thirdly, that the common agricultural policy should no longer take a growing proportion of the Community budget. I want to comment on each of those points.

First, the budget. After the prospective increase in own resources, the new system will reduce our contribution to about half what we would have paid had there been no agreement. It will take effect on the revenue side, with provision for abatement of our contribution being made through the new own resources decision now under discussion. The 1,000 million ecu due to us for 1985 will, in accordance with the Fontainebleau agreement, also be made available in the same way.

The Commission's draft of the decision has been recommended for debate by the Select Committee on European Legislation. The House will, of course, also have a full opportunity to give its views on the terms of the decision when it is presented to Parliament for approval.

Secondly, budget discipline. Agreement on that is a prerequisite for our approval of the new own resources decision. The European Council established two key principles: first, that the maximum level of expenditure to finance Community policies was to be laid down each year; secondly, that net expenditure on agriculture was to increase at less than the rate of growth of the own resources base. Work on a text that will guarantee the effective application of those principles is nearing completion.

This will be the first time that the Council has bound itself to such a ceiling for expenditure — both agricultural and non-agricultural—and to live within it. In the words of a paper tabled in Brussels in November 1983 by M. Jacques Delors, due soon to take over as President of the Commission, from now on

"Expenditure must be determined by the means available, not the other way round".

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): In view of my right hon. and learned Friend's previous experience in another key position in the Government, so that he knows as much—or more—about this matter as most others, I should like to ask him whether the discussions on financial discipline encompassed any consideration of supplementary budgets and the effect that they can sometimes have in getting round ceilings and limits that are imposed at the beginning of each year? Has that been considered, and will it be part of the mechanism?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That is an important consideration. It is necessary not to allow devices to be used to enable the mechanism to be escaped from. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to that matter. As he says, the concept is one with which I am familiar. I was pleased that the very sentence that I quoted from the French Finance Minister, as he then was, was almost literally an echo of one of my few statements to appear in *The Observer's* "Sayings of the Week". I said that finance must determine expenditure and not expenditure finance. I think that I put it slightly more crisply than M. Delors, but we were both on the same track.

That is an important development. With German, Dutch and, increasingly, French support we now have a real opportunity to introduce a sensible balance into how the Community uses its resources.

Mr. Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that there is already cause for concern? Will he confirm that expenditure has risen to 1·2 per cent. and all the signs are that it is still rising? Those who are in authority in the Commission, particularly in agriculture, can see no way in which we shall not bump up against a new ceiling. How can one control that when one has commitments in advance on the agricultural side?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend has made a point to which I shall refer next. I entirely agree that the way in which the CAP is operated and applied is the key to the long-term solution to the problem. The extent to which surpluses have built up means that it is bound to take time to attack and reduce the problem to which my hon. Friend referred. Of course we must preserve the benefits of the CAP. However, we must avoid guaranteeing, as in practice the CAP has so far, that whatever the market conditions, surplus production will be funded by the Community taxpayer.

The Agriculture Council meeting on 31 March this year put in place some of the key decisions that are necessary to take us in that direction. The important thing is for us to sustain pressure for the application of those principles and their implementation throughout the Community. It will require constant vigilance by members of the Council, and Members of the House and of the European Parliament. It is a long-term exercise. If we can make headway on that, as we must, another great task will face us—to build on Fontainebleau to make the Community work better for all its member states. That will be one of the major challenges for the new Commission. It will be fortunate to have M. Delors as its President. As I have already said, we have worked alongside each other as Finance Ministers. Not just as a result of that stern and invigorating shared experience, which I share in a residual capacity with the right hon. Member for Leeds, East, I have a profound respect for M. Delors' determination to manage the Commission on realistic and practical lines.

We in the United Kingdom have already put forward many practical ideas for the Community agenda. There are, for instance, some simple businesslike institutional changes that could rapidly make a difference. The European Council must be less of a court of appeal and better adapted to giving strategic direction to the Community, telling the Community what the member states, expressing their views to the Council of Ministers, want the Community to do.

Each member state has the equivalent of our own Queen's Speech, setting the agenda for action over the coming years. The European Council should do the same for the Community as a whole. I know that M. Delors shares our view of the need for clear priorities.

Above all, we want practical measures and tangible benefits for the peoples of the Community. When our lorry drivers can travel without undue frontier delays in continental Europe; when it costs the same to fly from London to Paris as from New York to Washington; when British insurers can compete freely in German markets; then, and only then, shall we be making a reality of some of the most basic provisions of the treaty of Rome.

A genuine Community-wide market should create a more competitive climate in which European business can prosper and Europe can compete better in world markets. That is the way to create the lasting jobs that Britain, like the rest of Europe, so badly needs.

The Community must also fulfil its responsibilities in the world. Let me give three examples of how it is seeking to do so. The first, of course, is enlargement, from 10 members to 12. The negotiations are now reaching their concluding stages. We want to see them completed by the end of the year, so that Spain and Portugal can enter the Community on 1 January 1986. Secondly, the Community needs to complete the current negotiations on a successor to the present Lomé convention, governing its relations with 64 African, Caribbean and Pacific states.

Thirdly, there is political co-operation. Almost all the problems that I discussed earlier in my speech have been the subject of discussion with our Community partners. That growing habit of concerted action is increasingly valuable because it enables us to make our joint influence felt across the whole field of foreign affairs.

Nowhere has there been a more distinctive European approach than over the problems of the middle east. Ten days ago I paid a brief visit to Lebanon, for talks with President Gemayel and Prime Minister Karame. I went on from there to Israel. I was able to have there very friendly and open discussions with all the senior Ministers in the new Israeli Government. I also had a most useful meeting with Palestinian representatives.

I returned from those visits more than ever convinced of the need for an end to the tragic suffering of the Lebanese people, and for early movement towards a settlement of the central Arab-Israel dispute. In Lebanon I was able to reaffirm to President Gamayel our support for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from his country. The Government of Israel left me in no doubt that they wish to withdraw their forces from Lebanon soon, subject to the negotiation of satisfactory security arrangements for Israel's northern border. The next step must be direct contacts. I am therefore very glad that the UN Secretary-General has taken the initiative to convene talks between Israeli and Lebanese military representatives.

Our policy on the Arab-Israel dispute is clear and consistent. I explained it in the same terms to Israeli

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Ministers and Palestinian representatives: the same terms as I have also used in discussions with Arab leaders. It is based on the firm belief that no durable settlement is possible without acceptance by the parties of two basic principles. These principles, which cannot be repeated too often, are Israel's basic right to a secure and peaceful existence, and the Palestinians' right to self-determination. The role of the United States, with its unique position of influence, will remain a vital one.

I shall be discussing with the new American Administration how best to give the search for peace in the middle east the high priority it deserves. We and our European partners will continue to do all in our power to help that process forward.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Before the right hon. and learned Gentleman concludes his comments on the middle east, will he comment on the Iraq-Iran war? Does he agree that that is hardly a good example of a coherent approach by the European Community in that Iraq is basically armed by France, and Iran, although it does not receive arms from us, is now trading more with Britain than it did in the days of the Shah, with most of the resulting money going on arms?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The approach of the European Community to the need for an end to the Iran-Iraq conflict is based essentially on persuading the parties to recognise the need to bring the conflict to a conclusion. Doing that head-on has so far made little headway. The approach that has made headway is the delimitation of the conflict and the agreement, which has largely been observed, to refrain from attacks on civilian targets. The most hopeful approach currently on the table is the way in which the Japanese have put forward a development of that, seeking to limit the scope of the conflict rather than trying, which seems so difficult, to bring it to an end.

I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I say no more than that. I have tried to deal with most of the major topics, but I was about to say that no opening speech in a foreign affairs debate can deal with all of them. That is one of the subjects that I have not been able to cover. Another is the Cyprus question. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will be glad to cover further subjects that arise during the debate.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir G. Howe: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way to him. I must draw my remarks to a close now.

Mr. Corbyn: Cyprus.

Sir G. Howe: I shall not deal with it en passant. My right hon. Friend will comment on it at the end of the debate if the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) raises the matter.

I want in conclusion to underline one factor. The complexities of foreign affairs do not lend themselves to the simplistic recipes of the ideologue, nor the contortions of those who are prepared to cast away principles in the vain pursuit of a spurious party unity. This Government have restored respect for Britain abroad.

We have shown ourselves a firm and reliable member of the North Atlantic Alliance. We have shown ourselves determined in the search for stable and peaceful relations between east and west. We have achieved at Fontainebleau a major advance for the European Community. We have kept up and strengthened our partnership with our friends in the Commonwealth. We have shown in the Hong Kong agreement that steady and determined diplomacy can achieve results.

In a dangerous and unstable world we have shown that this country stands for civilised and democratic values. That is the basis on which we shall continue to promote British interests in the coming year.

10.13 am

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): Since our last debate, the Foreign Secretary has achieved one impressive success in the agreement on Hong Kong. He was rightly congratulated by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House on his achievement. I am sorry that the love feast gave him a touch of indigestion, but I hope to correct that this morning by administering a slightly more balanced diet.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman was right to say that, since we last debated foreign affairs, some terrible events have occurred in other parts of the world. The murder of Mrs. Gandhi has imposed the worst strains on the largest democracy in the world since the bloodshed which attended its birth. The tragic famine in Ethiopia has reminded us of a catastrophe which already faces all the African peoples just south of the Sahara, right from Sudan in the east to Senegal in the west. It reminds us, too, that 500 million of our fellow beings today are suffering from chronic malnutrition all over the world and that 15 million children die from hunger and related diseases every year. That is the equivalent of the death toll at Hiroshima every three days. If the Ethiopian tragedy has done nothing else, I hope that it has directed the attention of Governments and peoples to these horrifying facts.

Meanwhile, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman had to admit, the war in the Gulf continues in the middle east and peace in the near east still remains extremely fragile. The martyrdom of the majority of the people of South Africa continues. There is still civil war in El Salvador and Guatemala, and there is an imminent risk of American military intervention in Nicaragua. The British taxpayer is still forking out £2 million a year for every family living on the Falkland Islands. Meanwhile, the world's debt problem is growing steadily worse, threatening political stability in the Third world and financial disaster for the western world. Above all, the arms race continues unabated and is now entering its most dangerous phase since the first nuclear bombs were exploded at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Many of these problems were necessarily left untouched in recent months because of uncertainty about the result of the American election—and, more so, the difficulty of getting coherent American attention devoted to these problems while the election was proceeding. But President Reagan's re-election removes all excuse for continuing to ignore these clamant problems. I shall try to deal shortly, inevitably, with each of them in turn, starting with the arms race.

What worries many of us most is that both sides—the Russians and the Americans—are now deploying new weapons which will greatly increase the risk of war

and make arms control much more difficult. Cruise missiles capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear warheads are being deployed by the Russians and by the United States, and both sides are deploying missiles whose flight time is so rapid that the reaction to the first information that they have been fired will have to be taken by computers and not by political decision. The SS22s in East Germany and Czechoslovakia could hit the cruise bases at Molesworth and Greenham common just three minutes after we first knew that they were on their way.

On top of this, the United States Administration have decided to try to deploy an anti-satellite system in outer space and to develop the so-called "star wars" system of defence against ballistic missiles. If these two developments came to fruition, they would threaten the whole basis of stability on which the nuclear balance has lasted for the last 30 years. At this moment, NATO Governments are considering proposals to shift NATO strategy towards deep strike into eastern Europe and western Russia. If it were adopted, that strategy again would be bound to be met by a Soviet strategy involving deep strikes against western Europe and the United Kingdom.

The extraordinary feature to ordinary people is that this new development in the arms race on both sides is taking place at a time when leading scientists, both in the Soviet Union and in Europe and the United States, have come to the conclusion that if either side were ever to explode even a fraction of its existing nuclear arsenals in war there would be a danger of creating so much soot in the upper atmosphere as to blot out the sun for months. It would be condemning its own people to a lingering death in conditions of arctic night and it is even possible that all human life and plant life in the northern hemisphere would come to an end.

Yet Her Majesty's Government not only ignore these findings; they actually attack them, as the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram), did the other day, as a

"blatant propaganda exercise deliberately seeking to mislead people about civil defence."

I can think of no more damaging and inadequate response to this new finding than that, and I hope that the Minister of State will totally disavow the extraordinarily inadequate and damaging reaction of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland.

The United States Administration are at least taking those findings seriously. They are to spend $50 million over the next five years in examining the concept of nuclear winter in more detail, and they will undoubtedly make changes in their policy, not only on civil defence but on strategy, in consequence of that examination. I am sorry that the Foreign Secretary made no reference to that new development.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is not the right hon. Gentleman off course by 180 degrees on the question of deep strike into Warsaw pact countries? The whole purpose of SACEUR strategy and the follow-on forces interdiction strategy is to raise the nuclear threshold, with precision munitions of a conventional kind to check the follow-through — the second echelon. As far as the strategic defence initiative and ballistic missile defence are concerned, the whole purpose of the investigation being conducted by the United States Administration is to make a pre-emptive nuclear strike incredible. The possibility of a nuclear night, the awesome apocalypse of which the right hon. Gentleman has given us a dreadful description, should be diminished rather than enhanced by such developments.

Mr. Healey: I wish that I was as innocent as the hon. Gentleman. The fact is that SACEUR has presented the follow-on forces concept as related to the air-land battle strategy of the United States army, which envisages the use of chemical and nuclear weapons for deep strike as well as the use of conventional weapons. One of the problems of the emerging technology weapons is that they are dual-capable and that there is therefore a great risk that, even if they were used in the conventional mode, the enemy could not afford to assume that they were not carrying nuclear warheads. That strategy would therefore greatly increase the possibility of war. I am glad to see from the hon. Gentleman's nods that he secretly agrees with me.

Mr. Wilkinson: As deterrents.

Mr. Healey: On the point about "star wars", the trouble is that what the United States may see — if it works — as something enabling it to prevent a Soviet pre-emptive strike may appear to the Russians to be preparation for an American first strike by guaranteeing the invulnerability of the rest of American forces to Soviet retaliation. The hon. Gentleman must accept that many people involved in defence over the past 30 years on both sides of the Atlantic have that misgiving about the "star wars" strategy. I am glad to see that, even if the hon. Gentleman is not nodding, he is looking thoughtful. That is progress.

The one encouraging development since the American election is the fact that there is some evidence that President Reagan is genuinely seeking to reach an agreement on arms control or disarmament with the Soviet Union. However, I believe that he probably genuinely wanted agreement last time he was in office, but was prevented by bureaucratic in-fighting between the White House, the State Department, the Arms Control and Development Agency and the Department of Defence from producing a coherent approach to the problems of arms control which had the slightest chance of getting to first base. In the coming days, we shall all watch anxiously for any changes of personnel—or, indeed, structure—in the American President's approach to arms control in his second term which will give a better chance of success.

Europe cannot afford to wait until the United States has sorted out its familiar bureaucratic muddles. I was pleased by one suggestion apparently made by the Foreign Secretary. I hope that I did not misunderstand him. Searching in the bran tub of his woolly rhetoric for the nuggets of meaning is sometimes a tiring and exhausting job. However, the Foreign Secretary seems to suggest that Britain should lead the way in this area. I strongly agree with him on that point. Under Prime Ministers of both parties — Lord Stockton and Lord Wilson — British Governments have taken initiatives which in the end were accepted by the United States and led to agreement with the Soviet Union. The Opposition greatly welcome the Government's invitation to Mr. Gorbachev to visit this country next month. However, what policies are we to put forward, and what initiative do we propose to break the existing deadlock?

The Foreign Secretary referred to Mr. Shultz's admirable sentiments in a recent speech in Los Angeles,

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but more than two months have passed since, on 2 September, Mr. Chernenko put four proposals to the Western powers, the acceptance of any one of which, he said, could break the deadlock and lead to the resumption of general negotiations on disarmament. His first proposal was an agreement to stop the militarisation of outer space. His second was for a mutual freeze on the development and deployment of nuclear weapons. Third, he suggested that America should follow Russia's unilateral pledge not to use nuclear weapons first. Fourth, he proposed ratification of the test ban treaties negotiated in 1974 and 1976. What is more, Mr. Chernenko make it explicity clear in that interview that Russia was no longer insisting on the removal of existing American missiles from Europe before the talks began.

Now that the American election is over, that shift in the Soviet position requires an immediate response from the West. I hope that the Government are arguing to the United States that we should immediately accept a ratification of the two test ban treaties, and that we would be prepared for at least a moratorium for a period of months—which I understand is under consideration in Washington—on the testing of anti-satellite weapons. The Russians have put forward concrete proposals which represent an important shift in the position which they held as recently as last summer, and a Western response is required. Provided that we can get the process started, there is a strong case — it appears to be under consideration in Washington—for merging the strategic arms reduction talks and the intermediate nuclear force negotiations.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman made some points about unilateral action proposed by my party. What we have proposed is that he should agree now to include the existing British nuclear forces in the arms talks. How can he justify unilaterally keeping the British nuclear weapons out of the talks about disarmament—whether in the European context of the INF talks, or in the START context—when he knows as well as I do that SALT I and SALT II, which he claims to support, tacitly took account of the size of the British and French nuclear forces?

How can the right hon. and learned Gentleman twit us with unilateralism when he proposed unilaterally to increase the striking power of the British deterrent by a factor of at least six? The right hon. and learned Gentleman has not yet told us how many warheads on the D5 missile he plans to order for his proposed Trident force. He should now listen to what is being said by representatives of the services through the Ministry of Defence, and by many of his own Back Benchers, about the undesirability of proceeding with the highly expensive, highly dangerous and untested Trident programme, and agree that henceforward he will put all Britain's strategic nuclear weapons into the arms talks. There is no question but that the refusal of the British and French Governments to do so during the INF talks was one major cause of their breakdown.

Mr. Forth: Does the right hon. Gentleman have any problem with the attitude of the Socialist Government in France on this matter? President Mitterrand is pledged to increase the effectiveness of France's independent force because he believes, from a Socialist point of view, that that is the best way in which to talk peace.

Mr. Healey: I disagree with the president of France, and I told him so when the leader of my party and I met him a fortnight ago. I believe that French defence policy is reaching the point at which its internal contradictions will require some painful choices. I am glad to say that I shall be chairing a discussion between French and British defence experts at Avignon in a few weeks' time.

I think that the Foreign Secretary will agree that progress on disarmament is bound to be limited unless there is also progress on some of the political issues that divide the Soviet Union from the West. I agree with him —again, if I read his code correctly—that the middle east is probably the best area to start. It seems that the United States and the Soviet Union have reached some understanding about how to handle the dangers of the war in the Gulf. Indeed, we have the astonishing spectacle of the United States and the Soviet Union as co-belligerants with Iraq, one of the partners in the Gulf war, to ensure that Iran does not win. I do not ask the Foreign Secretary to comment on these delicate matters, although I see from the smile that is playing around his benign features that he might go some way towards agreeing with me about the irony of that situation.

Is it not time for Washington and Moscow to resume the discussions that started seven or eight years ago between Mr. Vance and Mr. Gromyko on limiting arms supplies generally to the middle east and other areas of tension? Those discussions were broken off in 1977 for a variety of reasons. It would appear that there is an overwhelming case for resuming them now and I do not believe that any western country has derived any long-term benefits by selling arms widely to both sides in the middle east war. Earlier this year, we had the extraordinary spectacle of the West looking like losing a large part of its oil supplies because French Super Etendard aircraft launched French Exocet missiles against tankers in the Gulf. The response to that would be the mining of the Gulf by Iran with French mines dropped by French torpedo boats. The time has come for a serious attemptt to limit arms supplies in the middle east and other parts of the world.

In central America, an essential part of the Contadora process, which the Foreign Secretary endorsed, is the cessation of arms supplies to countries in the area. The same is true for the subcontinent. There is no doubt that America's decision to rearm Pakistan since the Russians invaded Afghanistan has led to an Indian response that is creating a new arms race on the subcontinent. The consequences of that could be especially dangerous after the murder of Mrs. Gandhi and in view of the difficulty that India now faces.

Perhaps I might make a philosophical comment about the middle east. It seems that the lesson of post-war western policy in the middle east is that no external power makes long-term gains by unilateral intervention. Britain and France learned that in 1956 and the United States has learned it repeatedly, most notably in the Lebanon. I recall that possibly our most distinguished post-war ambassador in the middle east, Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, prefaced his book on his experience with a couplet from Hilaire Belloc which ran:

> "Decisive action in the hour of need,
> Denotes the hero but does not succeed."

We, the French and the Americans have learned that and the middle east powers have found it well-nigh impossible to exercise lasting influence outside their countries. Egypt twice tried to make a permanent constitutional link with Syria and failed. Syria is no more able to control what happens between the warring parties in the Lebanon than was Israel, Britain or France before her. In those circumstances, the most sensible thing is for the external powers at least to try to agree not to intervene against each other's interests and to try to create a framework in which the internal problems are less dangerous to world stability. It is not possible to achieve stability in the middle east unless the Soviet Government is involved in the process. We have already learnt that in the Gulf. I believe that the same will prove equally true in the Lebanon and in the search for an Israeli-Arab solution.

The Foreign Secretary visited Israel and the Lebanon recently. I think that he agrees that an Israeli withdrawal is likely to require an effective UNIFIL presence which is substantially larger than that which exists at the moment, and possibly a somewhat expanded mandate. The Foreign Secretary knows as well as I do that that will require Soviet agreement in the Security Council. Every Arab country now agrees that Russia should be involved, as does every European country, except President Mubarak and the Foreign Secretary who have adopted the advice of that great Algerian holy man, St. Augustine:

"Give me chastity and continency—but not yet."

I think that the Foreign Secretary said in a recent speech that Russia should be involved but that the time for that has not yet come. If I read the right hon. and learned Gentleman's code wrongly, perhaps he will answer.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I would not want the right hon. Gentleman to be under any misunderstanding. It is plainly sensible for Russia to be involved in the sense of participating in discussions on issues such as the Gulf war and the future of UNIFIL. It is clearly desirable for such regional issues to be the subject of discussion by the superpowers and more widely. I have discussed these subjects with Mr. Gromyko because of the practical reason that the right hon. Gentleman gave in regard to UNIFIL, for example. The only difference between us concerns the comparable role of a conference along the lines proposed by the Soviet Union. I do not begin to doubt the need for discussion and consultation.

Mr. Healey: I am immensely grateful to the Foreign Secretary for making that clear—it was not quite so clear from his speech of about one month ago. I do not believe that it is possible to make progress without involving the Soviet Union. Everyone must accept that.

As to the Arab-Israeli conflict, I agree with the Foreign Secretary that it is desperately desirable that we try to reach a long-term settlement. However, he must agree that there can be no settlement unless the United States is prepared to use its influence with Israel to get its participation in a settlement. President Reagan's last proposal was rejected out of hand by the Israeli Government. It is worth remembering that the only American President who has used American influence in this sense was another Republican just after an election in 1952. President Eisenhower used his influence and prevented the Israelis from diverting the Jordan river from surrounding Arab countries. There will be no progress on Israel unless President Reagan is prepared to follow that precedent.

There is some sign of progress in Africa. It seems possible that Cuba might be prepared to withdraw its troops from the Horn and from Angola. In the latter case, the last excuse for South Africa's holding up an agreement on Namibia will have disappeared. I must confess that the Government have not commanded much confidence in regard to the robustness of their approach to South Africa on these issues. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who returns from Poland today, has been following a policy of doormat diplomacy with Mr. Botha. That is highly regrettable.

What specific action will the Government take against the South African Government to illustrate their displeasure at the South African Government's breaking of a solemn promise by not returning the Coventry four to face trial? South Africans are used to rough words. The favourite nursery rhyme of South African mothers is:

"Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me."

The South African Government broke a solemn obligation, and the British Government threatened to take specific action about it. We want to know what that action is.

Regarding the three Indians who remain in our consulate in Durban, I was glad to hear the Foreign Secretary say that he regarded humanitarian considerations as paramount. I understand that they are still prevented from seeing their lawyers, although the lawyers were recently informed that they now have leave to appeal to the Supreme Court in Bloemfontein. When the Minister replies, I hope that he will assure us that the Government are prepared to allow the lawyers of those men to visit them to receive instructions for that possible appeal.

Many hon. Members are greatly worried about central America. Talks have recently begun between Mr. Duarte and Mr. Ungo, which offer at least a chance of ending the disastrous civil war in El Salvador. Elections were held in Nicaragua, which were regarded by all the British hon. Members who attended them, including the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby), all 400 American unofficial observers who attended them and by the French Foreign Secretary, as free and fair. Criticisms can and have justifiably been made about the attitude of the regime earlier in the summer, but the regime was undoubtedly prepared, if necessary, to delay the elections until January. Mr. Arce told Dr. Cruz that at a meeting in Rio a month ago.

All observers on the spot and all British correspondents, such as those for the *Financial Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Times*, agreed that the support received for the Sandinista Government represented the overwhelming view of the people of Nicaragua. It is worth reminding ourselves that President Reagan in his magnificent triumph in the United States won only 30 per cent. of the total electorate. He got 60 per cent. of a 50 per cent. poll. By contrast, in Nicaragua Mr. Ortega got more than 50 per cent. of the total electorate—nearly 70 per cent. of an 82 per cent. poll. If the Government really believe in self-determination and the sovereignity of independent states, they must note those facts and insist that the United States also notes them.

I deeply regret that the Government have not joined their European partners in speaking out against recent American intervention in Nicaragua. The United States Administration have violated the ruling of the International Court of Human Rights, which was made in

[Mr. Healey]

the Hague in June, by mining the harbours in Nicaragua. They have violated the United Nations charter and the treaties of the Organisation of American States.

During the election campaign, President Reagan encouraged the recruitment of volunteers to fight with the Somozista forces. That is a violation of America's own Neutrality Act. He allowed the publication of a CIA manual — it makes the Mafia look like a vicarage tea party — which is a guide to terrorists about how to employ criminals to murder people who stand in the way of the success of terrorism. The Gracious Speech commits the Government to fighting terrorism, and, according to the Foreign Secretary, we are supported by other Governments in that. What representations has he made to the United States' Government about the publication of the Central Intelligence Agency manual? I am prepared to give way if he wishes to answer that now. I see that he is writing furiously. When the Minister replies he may, or may not, give us an answer.

Many hon. Members will remember how, in the aftermath of an earlier American election, the CIA bounced the new President into a disastrous foray against Cuba—the Bay of Pigs affair. In recent days, it appears that something similar is happening in the United States. If the Foreign Secretary cares that European public opinion should support the alliance with the United States, as I do, it is his duty to intervene now and to warn the United States' Government how Europe would regard a third invasion by American troops of Nicaragua since the first world war.

Nicaragua has the same rights to self-determination and sovereignty as the Falkland Islands or any other part of that great sub-continent. One of the dangers that lies behind the risk of an American intervention is its effect on public opinion in Latin America. There is strong anti-Yankee feeling there now, not least because most countries' living standards have been depressed to pay off debts to American banks, which were often incurred by earlier regimes. That is true of Argentina. The debt burden continues to grow. The strain on the banks has greatly reduced banking confidence and has led to the nationalisation by a British Conservative Government of a bank in Britain and by an American Conservative Government of a bank in the United States. Defaults have already begun. Some months ago Bolivia announced that it would not service its debts, and Peru appears to be on the point of doing so now. None of the Governments or banks dares describe what is happening because it would affect their balance sheets, but plainly defaults have begun. If America took military action against Nicaragua, the tidal wave of anti-Yankee feeling in Latin America could lead to a chain reaction of defaults and, indeed, to the fall of many Latin American Governments.

The ultimate threat is not to western banks. It is already clear that western banks that are in trouble will be nationalised and that Governments will print the money to pay for their nationalisation. Indeed, Mr. Leutwiler, the chairman of the Bank for International Settlements, invited them to do that at the last meeting. The consequences for the Third world of the loss of access to credit could be disastrous. The best proof of that is what is happening now in Africa.

I shall conclude with the implications of the famine in Ethiopia, which will be dealt with in greater detail later. We must accept that the Ethiopian famine is only the best dramatised case of a famine that is probably equally severe in Chad and Bangladesh, and which cuts a great swathe across Africa, south of the Sahara from the Sudan to Senegal. I read in the *Daily Telegraph* yesterday that Germany and France have given four times as much cereal aid and Holland, with its tiny population, five times as much aid as Britain has. I should like the Minister responsible for aid to tell the House whether he agrees with those figures.

In recent years, the West has undoubtedly shown a callous cruelty to the growing problem of starvation in the Third world. The World Bank, led by one of the most Conservative American bankers, Tom Clausen, told the assembled Finance Ministers at the International Monetary Fund World Bank meeting two months ago that unless it got $2 billion immediately, the spectre of disaster would appear throughout Africa south of the Sahara. He was turned down flat by the United Kingdom, the German Government and the American Government. What is now happening in Africa is a direct result of that failure to respond to an urgent demand by the World Bank. Even after we had seen those tragic pictures of famine in Ethiopia on our television screens, the British representative at a meeting of the International Fund for Agricultural Development refused to contribute any money to keep it going because of an arcane bureaucratic wrangle between OPEC and the Western powers.

That is just not good enough. The other day one of the world's leading figures said this:

> "This poor south will judge the rich north. And the poor people and poor nations — poor in different ways, not only lacking food but also deprived of freedom and other human rights — will judge those people who take away these goods from them, amassing to themselves the imperialistic monopoly of economic and political supremacy at the expense of others."

That was not Mr. Chernenko speaking; it was His Holiness the Pope speaking during his tour of Canada just before the IMF meetings.

I hope that that will open the eyes of Government and bureaucracy to the urgency of the problem. I do not deny that the problems are overwhelmingly difficult and complex. As Lord Cameron wrote in *The Times*, there is an urgent need to set up permanent contingency arrangements for emergency action in cases of extreme tragedy, such as that in Ethiopia. We must hold massive stocks of food on the spot in areas likely to be subject to famine. We know that those stocks exist; they have been maintained at enormous cost by members of the European Community. There is a crying need for agricultural development, and there is a crying need to give the countries where climate, or the poverty of the land, offer no prospect of them feeding themselves, the means to earn money with which to buy the food that they need.

I do not wish to dwell further on the past, but I would say this to the Foreign Secretary—I said it to him in a letter a week ago. In January, the Government offered $200 million to a special IDA fund — the soft loan agency of the World Bank. It was not taken up because other countries refused to match the offer. Will the Government tell us today that they are now prepared to offer that $200 million to the International Fund for Agricultural Development, because that at least would do something to reassure us that they are taking the problem seriously?

I must ask the Foreign Secretary about what happened in the Cabinet meeting yesterday. There are reports that

the Chancellor of the Exchequer succeeded in persuading the Cabinet to cut the aid budget, which has already been cut under this Government from 0·5 per cent. of our GDP to one third of 1 per cent. If those reports are true, they will expose all the Government's talk during the past fortnight as odious and cruel hypocrisy. I hope that the Minister will tell us about this when he replies.

The famine in Ethiopia has done much not only to wake the conscience of the world but to make the world aware of the realities of the appalling gap in wealth between north and south. Nothing would do more to restore confidence in the political process in the western world than a major effort by all western Governments to attack those problems at their source, and to offer a joint campaign of attack to the Governments of the Communist countries. Co-operation in this area, offered by the West, would do more than anything else to create a climate in which our other problems could be solved.

During the coming Session we shall judge the Government's performance against the words spoken by the Foreign Secretary this morning. If they fall short in any of the ways that I mentioned, we shall be merciless in opposing them.

10.55 am

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): I rise in some trepidation after the peroration of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey). It is always a pleasure to follow him in debates, and one always enjoys his speeches although one might not always agree with everything that he says. I follow him in this spirit at least; in foreign affairs debates the tradition is and should remain that there is more opportunity for agreement across the Floor of the House than there is in some other subjects that the House must address.

Another reason why I am grateful for being called early in the debate is that it is often difficult for Back-Bench Members, who must sit through foreign affairs debates as the evenings wear on, to select subjects for discussion that their colleagues have not already covered at least three times. I have often waited during debates prepared for at least three subjects for discussion, in various stages of array and disarray. At least on this occasion I can address what I consider to be the most important subject. A tour du monde does not come as well from the Back Benches as it does from the Front Benches, so it is better for us to select one subject. I wish to talk about East-West relations, which are crucially important, and I shall also refer to the recent presidential election in the United States.

Now is the time for progress in East-West relations, and I feel strongly that if we fail now, the damage could be irreparable. I hope that I am not alone in recognising an increasingly relevant role for the United Kingdom in the important progress towards disarmament and world peace. The matter is also crucial because of the recent background, which is not the happiest part of the story. In recent years, there has been far too much cheap Soviet-bashing, sometimes to get easy applause, in too many Western countries, and I fear that we could relapse into the sad state of affairs from which we have all too recently, thank goodness, escaped.

The subject is crucial because of President Reagan's big win in the presidential election. Much now depends on who is appointed to key positions in the White House and elsewhere. I attended the Republican convention, and I can say I am relieved that the size of the President's victory was not repeated in Congress. That is a healthy sign. Although it is not for us to intervene in such matters, perhaps America could do without Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I say that with some knowledge of what his Senate colleagues think about the matter. Happily, to fulfil his pledge in North Carolina, the Senator will, it is to be hoped, remain as chairman of the agriculture Committee.

The Soviets want to talk and want progress, because, although the economics of the arms race may be too much for us, defence takes a crucial proportion of the Soviet budget and hinders their aspirations for the future. However, we should never under-estimate their basic patriotism and determination in the face of their vast loss —much greater than ours—in the second world war. When one visits Russia, one is blind if one does not encounter it, and we should recognise the fact.

It is crucial also to remember that hawks on one side breed all too many hawks on the other. That is what I mean when I say that if we fail now the damage could be irreparable in terms of future possibilities and progress.

We must recognise some of the obstacles to progress in the recent past. One such obstacle is the way in which we tend to talk to each other. That was summed up by Lord Carrington, a knowledgeable and experienced former Foreign Secretary, as megaphone diplomacy. An example is the "Kingdom of Evil" speech—it must be said, now retracted by President Reagan. Such terms are no better than the Soviet Union referring to the President as Hitler. We must avoid descending to that level in international dialogue. That avoidance must be permanent rather than temporary.

We must be thankful that there has been a change in the dialogue between East and West and perhaps the change is not unrelated to the views of the western electorate——

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 5 (Friday sittings).*

Business of the House

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): With permission, I shall make a short statement about the business for next week.

Following discussions through the usual channels, the business for Friday 16 November will now be as follows: Second Readings of the Friendly Societies Bill and of the Mineral Workings Bill.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Will my right hon. Friend say when the Second Reading of the New Towns and Urban Development Bill is likely to be taken? It seems to have been lost in the changed order of business.

Mr. Biffen: Nothing is lost. The Second Reading of the New Towns and Urban Development Bill has merely been deferred.

Foreign Affairs and Overseas Development

Question again proposed.

11.2 am

Mr. Temple-Morris: I am flattered, Mr. Speaker, to be called so quickly to resume my speech. I was relaxing in my place and imagining that I could take a proper intermission.

I was dealing with megaphone diplomacy and the happy change that has been made to that approach. The process of change was started by President Reagan seeing the Soviet Union's Foreign Minister, Mr. Gromyko, slightly over a month ago. However, it is somewhat extraordinary that in the four years of the President's term of office there was no high-level contact between super-powers. The change in that state of affairs is to be welcomed.

There is a valid role for Britain because our part in the process of change is much more advanced than that of the United States. The Prime Minister's visit to Hungary was welcomed on both sides of the House, as was my right hon. and learned Friend's visit to Moscow. There is an increasing number of senior Soviets coming to Britain to visit our Parliament and Government. The right hon. Member for Leeds, East mentioned the visit of Mr. Gorbachev. The right hon. Gentleman must forgive me for being slightly sensitive when I say that I think that he let the House down by saying that Mr. Gorbachev was coming at the Government's invitation. In fact, he is coming at the invitation of Parliament and of Mr. Speaker. It is a visit that the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which represents all parties, has worked on consistently in recent years. The invitation to Mr. Gorbachev and a delegation was aided and abetted by the Select Committee in Foreign Affairs, whose members come from both sides of the House.

Mr. Healey: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, who is, of course, right. However, Mr. Gorbachev would not have accepted the invitation if the Government had not agreed to receive him.

Mr. Temple-Morris: I happen to know that the right hon. Gentleman is precisely correct. However, the more important point is that Members of this place, acting in a parliamentary rather than a governmental capacity, have a constructive role to play. A purely governmental visit is expected by Mr. Gromyko, which should be welcomed by both sides of the House. We have a role to play and I hope that it will be a continuing one. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has already been to Moscow and I hope that that will lead to an eventual summit, with a visit by the Prime Minister to Moscow.

There has been a mutual lack of understanding between East and West of their different systems. That is not unimportant from the Soviet side. However much they affect an understanding of western democracy, there has been a slight failure on their part to appreciate the rapidity of democratic change. Whatever their experience, they tend to stand bemused when Congressmen go to the electorate every two years and when Presidents face the electorate every four years.

The blessing of this election is that there is not a pause of months following a change in the Administration. There is no pause for months on end while thousands of

appointments are made. There is no repeat of the marking time on SALT II, the law of the sea and everything else upon which the Americans, Russians and others have been working for a long time. The Soviets are slightly bemused about this but the plus point of the recent election is that progress will continue. It is to be hoped that the seeds have been sown by the Americans, in meeting Mr. Gromyko, for a constructive future. One of the President's earliest pronouncements has been a call for umbrella talks. That must be followed up with great determination if they are to be achieved. It is significant that that is one of the first things that he has said following his re-election.

It is all too easy for the West to be tempted into engaging in too primitive a dialogue with the Soviet Union. That is something that I have always deplored. Dialogue with and attitudes towards the Soviet Union should not always be regarded as a super-power confrontation. When trying to reach policy decisions there is a tendency on the part of far too many to see reds under every bed. I do not address that comment solely to our American friends. All too many western leaders have expressed themselves in that rather primitive way in recent years. It is too easy to do that and it should be recognised that the issues are much more complicated. That approach can go beyond words into actions.

Both sides of the House are concerned about what is happening in central America, which is the United States' backyard. We have only a limited opportunity to exercise any control over what is happening. However, we can maintain an influence, as in other parts of the world, and express our views. There is a terrible danger that an escalation, if that is not too basic a term, could upset the applecart of East-West negotiations and progress towards disarmament, which in the view of many of us is all-important. That progress is certainly more important than the somewhat smaller issues that occur in central America.

I think that it is the view of many that those who have a primitive outlook on East-West confrontation always pay too little attention to local circumstances and events that are actually taking place. That applies to shells from the New Jersey pounding into the Chouf mountains as much as to the events that are taking place in and around Nicaragua.

We must accept realities. The Soviets are here to stay. We must accept their concentration on the system and policy rather than the man. We must accept their capacity to change leaders because of the concentration on policy rather than the man. We must accept also their lack of flexibility. Anyone who has dealt with them, even in a humble way — I have done so myself — finds it a somewhat frustrating experience. They do not have the most flexible system in the world. Their inactivity is sometimes so masterly that events can pass them by altogether. Democracy is more transient in its nature and our changes should be taken advantage of by them as much as we should appreciate what is going on within the Soviet Union. If we call the Soviets everything in the book, it stands to reason that they are human and will react. They will be suspicious of sudden changes of heart. We must work hard to achieve good and normal relations with the Soviet Union with a view to all-important disarmament talks.

Good and normal relations do not always constitute super-power stuff. They need not all relate to disarmament and governmental contact. There has to be a wider dialogue that is social, cultural and personal. That dialogue must extend right across the board. In the recent past, the dialogue has concentrated, for those engaged in it and for observers, on super-power contact and macro issues. The danger here is that distrust is heightened if something goes wrong. A wider approach is more absolute and gives a greater depth to superpower contact between East and West. There are many organisations in Britain that work extremely hard to maintain basic contact with the Soviet Union and the Great Britain USSR Association deserves the tribute of the House. It ensured that basic contact was maintained while the going was difficult and bleak. It has a limited budget, yet it has done a superb job in soldiering on in bad times.

The society was responsible for the first parliamentary delegation after Afghanistan comprising Members of Parliament, although not officially representing the House. In 1981 I participated in that delegation. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir J. Osborn), who is the chairman of the Soviet group, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and Lord Bottomley, who was a Member of this House, were all members of that delegation. There is a role for us to play. The House will forgive me mentioning here the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which I head. Through it, many individual hon. Members have played a considerable role in maintaining bridges when things were chilly because of Government actions.

We must work towards an atmosphere of less rivalry and more co-operation. The changes in the American Administration are crucial, because a climate of confidence must be created. That climate can be created only by avoiding competition and confrontation. That point applies to both the Russians and the Americans, because each tends to provoke the other. In recent years we have seen the way in which that provocation has descended. Now that we are on the way up, we must be conscious of all those factors. What happens in Latin America, the middle east and everywhere else is all important. As confrontation boils up, disarmament and world peace, which are all important to all of us, become more difficult to achieve and our confidence in our ability to achieve world peace is lessened. In recent years the Russians and the Americans have shown a lack of confidence in each other.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, East said that we need to create a better dialogue on the middle east. I was relieved that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said that we are at least approaching a meaningful dialogue with the Soviet Union on such matters as the middle east. It is apparent to all of us that there cannot be, for example, United Nations' action in the Lebanon or other areas where such action is relevant without the participation and approval of the Soviet Union in the Security Council. I am not alone in suggesting to the House that there will be no solution to middle east problems until the Soviet Union is involved to a greater extent. The matter is as simple as that, and it is up to our American friends and allies to appreciate it. If the Soviet Union is generally more involved, we shall create the climate for high-level dialogue and for successful disarmament talks. This matter is all-important, and deserves the attention of the entire House and the whole of the West and the East. We must succeed in getting those talks off the ground and those talks must be successful. Electorates in Britain and elsewhere will not tolerate our delay and our failure in this matter.

11.13 am

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) on his extremely constructive and positive speech. The hon. Gentleman rightly said that foreign affairs debates, as opposed to those on domestic issues, offer a far better opportunity for cross-party agreement. The hon. Gentleman is not, however, right in applauding that, because at the end of the day, when looking at international political matters, nationalism takes over. Whether one is a Conservative, a Socialist or even a Liberal, it becomes more important to talk about the national interest than about the political solution. I hope that we shall move slowly away from that view.

As the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) rightly pointed out, foreign affairs debates cover a wide area. I make one request to the Government Front Bench. Ministers who respond to foreign affairs debates must face up to a multitude of questions covering a wide area. Normally they do so by ignoring the fact that those questions were put. Previously, there was a custom whereby a Minister who ran out of time — possibly because of the development of some particularly effective peroration—would arrange for letters to be written to the hon. Member who asked the questions. I believe that that good custom should be revived.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Johnston: The Minister is shaking his head in a slightly deprecatory way. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that my experience during the last three foreign affairs debates is that that custom needs reviving.

I echo everything that was said by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East and others about the death of Indira Gandhi. Her death was a tragedy, and it has led to a ghastly series of riots and murders. We hope that the situation will become calm and that her son will effectively restore order to a great democracy.

We should properly congratulate President Reagan on his success. I must admit that I am not an admirer of the President, but the fact is that this old warrior has a better opportunity than any American President for a long time to make a positive contribution towards solving problems in a wide area—east and west, the middle east and central America—and I hope that he will do so.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, East congratulated the Foreign Secretary again on his actions on Hong Kong, and I suppose that I should do so as well. What is important is not only the success in Hong Kong, but the development of a better relationship with China. We do not often talk about China in these debates, but I believe that we shall have to discuss it more frequently in the years to come.

I agree entirely with what the right hon. Member for Leeds, East said about Nicaragua. I draw the attention of the Foreign Secretary to the speech made on Wednesday in the other place by the Social Democrat, Lord Kennet. The noble Lord had just returned from attending the Nicaraguan elections. Among other things, he said that he considered that those elections had been conducted fairly, that the results were perfectly proper and that, although there had been disturbances in advance of the elections —the Foreign Secretary referred to them—they were not extraordinary or such as to devalue the result of the elections.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, East asked about our response to South Africa's failure to yield the four people who were involved in arms dealing. The right hon. Gentleman asked what would be done. We should ask also: when will something be done? The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office—the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) — said that something was going to be done. He said the the court had requested that those people be returned to this country and that we were waiting. My simple question is: how long will we wait?

I confess that I am extremely depressed about the European Community. At the end of October, an excellent letter was printed in *The Times*. I shall quote a chunk of the letter because it put succinctly and well the things I believe and the actions that should commend themselves to the Government. The letter states:

> "Europe lacks sufficient monetary integration to provide a means of defence against American interest rates and the Japanese exchange rate".

We are still not in the European monetary fund. The letter goes on:

> "it continues to duplicate costly research programmes; it is failing to produce information technology on a scale that can compete; it has proved incapable of taking measures that would constitute a defence against the effects of disruption in the international oil market.
>
> After 25 years of common market it has not even eliminated technical barriers to internal trade".

The Minister would agree, but he would focus on just that and ignore the other aspects. The letter continues:

> "in terms of political influence it is still a dwarf when compared to the USA and the USSR, although its population and economic potential are as great.
>
> This situation cannot be dissociated from the fact that it can take years of negotiations in the Council to set up a single research programme, such as ESPRIT, and that the management of existing Community policies is subject to the abuse of the veto even by minor officials from national ministries.
>
> As President Mitterrand put it in his address to the European Parliament on May 26, 1984, 'How can such a complex and diversified unit as the Community has become be governed by the rules of the Diet of the old Kingdom of Poland, where every member could block the decisions? We all know where that led'."

That was a letter from Altiero Spinelli, a former Commissioner and a well known left-wing Italian politician. He was the originator of the proposal for a new treaty of European union. He expressed many wise words in that letter. Many people say that he is perhaps too idealistic, but he is pointing in the right direction.

One sentence in the letter following, from a Mr. J. Leech, summed up the position beautifully. He said:

> "It is curious that those least in favour of effective European institutions . . . are also the harshest critics of their deficiencies, without ever being aware of the connection."

The Government have shown no evidence of wishing to improve the decision-making processes of the Community or its democratic base. France appears to be moving away from the Luxembourg compromise, and I wonder how the Government will respond to that. When President Mitterrand was here, he was interviewed by *The Times*. The right hon. Member for Leeds, East referred to the part of it dealing with defence. Apart from that, I agreed with almost all the rest of what President Mitterrand said. Indeed, I said to myself that I wished he could have been the British Prime Minister. As the Foreign Secretary quotes the President of France with approbation when he deals with defence, he should try to be consistent and consider the President's views on other matters.

I do not think there is any evidence that the Government are willing to accept any kind of effective Community budget. Back Benchers frequently refer to the Community overspending again, but what is the Community to do for Portugal when it becomes a member? It is said that the Government are pledged to Spain and Portugal coming into the Community on 1 January 1986, but we cannot do anything for Portugal unless there are sufficient resources in the regional and social funds.

The Government's attitude is succoured by that of the Labour Opposition, who remain staunchly critical of everything that the Community does. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who is not here today, makes speech after speech in which he picks at every nit that he can find in the Community. He never says anything positive about what he sees in the Community.

I think that that attitude was to some extent reflected in the appointment of our Commissioners. Lord Cockfield is not known to me and he is not a leading light in Community matters. Yesterday I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Stanley Clinton Davis. He has already shown a willingness to see members of other parties and to maintain contact, and that is admirable. But, as he frankly admitted, he is a long-standing opponent of the Community. I said to him, "If you can, try to set that attitude aside. Otherwise, how on earth can you expect the Community to work?" Obviously, the Community cannot work if a large proportion of its Commissioners are opposed to the very idea of it.

The Community is very important in matters of overseas aid. The right hon. Member for Leeds, East dealt with that aspect of things at some length, and in doing so covered most of my points.

The tragedy in Ethiopia has been continuing for a considerable time, yet it was partly because of the accidental descent on Ethiopia of a BBC television team, on its way north from South Africa, that the famine received the world attention that it has had in recent weeks. It is a long-standing problem that affects the whole sub-Saharan region.

I do not like attacking the Foreign Secretary. I regard him, as does the right hon. Member for Leeds, East, as a benign man. It is all very well for the Foreign Secretary to say that the problem is terribly important, but such problems are there all the time, and the Government's record is one of continually cutting aid to Third world countries.

Reference has been made to the Foreign Secretary's success in the Hong Kong negotiations. When I was there in September, I was told on many occasions of concern about the increase in overseas students' fees. That action has adversely affected Britain's standing in Malaysia, in India and in the east generally.

In *The Scotsman* of 8 November there was a very good letter from Stanley Budd, the European Commission's representative in Scotland. He said:

"The EEC owns no food. No cereals, no beef, no milk-powder, not even any butter. Surpluses belong to Governments . . . Many writers in the Press in recent days have offered a simple solution: 'Ship the EEC's food mountain to Africa.' They seem to believe that the Commission in Brussels has the power to commandeer granaries, the money to hire ships and aircraft, and the staff to implement the operation. In fact, of course, every penny of the Community's own resources has to be fought for against the inbuilt resistance of national treasuries."

In other words, it is the responsibility of our Government, the French Government and the German Government—not the responsibility of the Commission—that the food mountain exists. The Commission cannot be blamed for it.

The Government stand condemned for reducing overseas aid. In 1982-83, our contribution was 0·34 per cent. of GNP, compared with the old target—laid down in the United Nations resolution 2626 of 1970—of 0·7 per cent. of GNP. Our contribution is only half that amount, and is getting smaller. The Government have made no attempt to enlighten public opinion on overseas aid. The cutting of the development education budget was in itself a significant act.

In the Gracious Speech, the hope is expressed that there will soon be a successful conclusion to the negotiations on the Lomé convention. What line are the Government taking on a renegotiatied Lomé convention?

I broadly agree with the Government's view on the middle east, and there is a fair degree of cross-party agreement, but the outlook is very depressing. At the beginning of September, I attended a seminar in Amman between representatives of Liberal International and the Arab Thought Forum, which is headed by Crown Prince Hassan, the brother of King Hussein. There is general agreement that the solution of the Palestinian problem lies only in some sort of state based on Gaza, on the west bank, but that objective becomes more and more difficult to attain.

There were 3,500 settlers on the west bank in 1977 when the Likud party came to power. There are now nearly 30,000. They are well integrated and it will be very difficult to secure their removal. In the end, it will be done only by United States pressure on Israel. My impression is that unless something positive happens over the next year or so, the moderates in the middle east—if I may call them that—will lose their power completely. If that happens there will probably be a succession of convulsions such as those that have taken place in the past in the Arab world, with dictatorships of the Left or of the Right emerging and endangering the oil supplies on which the West depends so greatly. The position is grave. We must put every possible pressure on the United States to take part in the Geneva conference that the Soviet Union has proposed, together with the King of Jordan and others. It would seem to be the most effective way forward.

With regard to East-West relations, all the indications are that the arms race will continue, that the United States will pursue "parity" as it calls it, and that the Soviet Union will respond by seeking to catch up with United States "superiority". I am not in sympathy with the USSR's form of government, but I believe that at the moment it can certainly be made to respond to an approach. I believe that the view of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East is correct.

The United Kingdom's contribution must be within the Atlantic Alliance. I do not believe in unilateral action. We must use all our influence with the United States of America. We should put Trident, if we have to have it —and I am not in favour of our having it, because I should prefer that Polaris be not replaced — into the negotiations, as the right hon. Gentleman said. There is no doubt that, in the previous negotiations, the Russians said that if the French and British included their deterrent in the negotiations they would reduce the number of missiles that they were putting in place. The general arms sales point was well made by the right hon. Gentleman. The Vance-Gromyko talks have perhaps been long forgotten.

[Mr. Johnston]

It is shameful that we fuel conflicts all over the world and receive money for that. We then flap our hands and say how terrible it is that all these Iranians are fighting these Iraqis, and that they must stop, but that does not stop the production of Exocets or trade.

We, as a country, have not yet adjusted or attuned ourselves to our European role. Our national disposition is to unilateral activity and to independence. In the end, that is politically Luddite. We see it in defence, in the European Community, and in overseas matters.

Our approach to overseas aid for the Third world has been profoundly inadequate. Brandt has been largely ignored and much of our behaviour, alas, has been thin and niggardly. I believe that we shall suffer from that. I believe that we could do much better in many areas.

11.31 am

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I take as my text the four main sentences in the Gracious Speech which deal with security policy and arms control:

"My Government consider as their highest priority the maintenance of national security and the preservation of peace. They will accordingly continue to play an active part in the Atlantic Alliance. . . .

With the allies of the United Kingdom, my Government will contribute to arms control and disarmament negotiations and will work for the resumption of negotiations where these have been broken off. They will work continually for a greater atmosphere of trust between East and West."

Having the debate soon after the dramatic re-election of President Reagan and Vice President Bush, an event which has been widely applauded on both sides of the House, we should consider the implications of that re-election for the Alliance and defence and security policy as a whole. In this context, it is beholden or worthy of us to consider an aspect of security policy that is especially President Reagan's own—the strategic defence initiative and the issue of ballistic missile defence.

In a speech in Pittsburgh on 30 October, Secretary for Defence Caspar Weinberger brought home clearly to his and to the wider audience world wide the great importance which the United States Administration attach to evaluating the potential of ballistic missile defence. He said:

"The United States has a vision . . . of a peace secured by strategic defence that would enable us to defend against nuclear missiles by non-nuclear means . . . We do not seek new weapons that could wreak untold devastation on an aggressor; we do look to the day when we will be able . . . to destroy weapons in flight rather than people on the ground."

He continued:

"Finding a thoroughly reliable means of destroying Soviet nuclear missiles . . . is, perhaps, the most morally right . . . and most noble of the enterprises in which the United States is engaged. We cannot do this yet, but we have made very good progress."

That, of course, very much follows President Reagan's speech of 23 March 1983 which had the same moral tone.

"Would it not be better to save lives than to avenge them?", the President asked.

"Are we not capable of demonstrating our peaceful intentions by applying all our abilities and our ingenuity to achieving a truly lasting stability? I think we are—indeed we must."

This is the important part:

"After careful consultation with my advisers, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I believe that there is a way. . . . It is that we embark on a programme to counter the awesome Soviet missile threat with measures that are defensive. Let us turn to the very strengths in technology that spawned our great industrial base. . . . I know this is a formidable technical task, one that may not be accomplished before the end of the century. Yet, current technology has attained a level of sophistication where it is reasonable for us to begin this effort."

The effort has begun. It is a sizeable effort, and it is one that will have cardinal importance to the evolution of Alliance strategy, the East-West balance and arms control during the remainder of the decade.

In the financial year 1985, $2 billion is being assigned to the strategic defence initiative to evaluate whether a space-based ballistic missile defence system is technically feasible. The totality of the programme, which will continue until financial year 1989, is of the order of some $25 billion.

We are all aware that many of the arguments on this subject are simplistic and emotional. Since Wernher von Braun and the Peenemünde team started developing the V2 rocket, and we had the construction thereafter of a succession of intercontinental ballistic missile systems, space technology has been used for military purposes. Its main use has been for offensive—potentially aggressive—military purposes. We are all aware that the outcome has been a system of deterrence, a balance of terror, that has, paradoxically, preserved the peace of the world; but it is an uneasy peace. It is a peace with which people are profoundly concerned. They do not believe that the proliferation of offensive systems and the building up of ever larger stockpiles of mass destruction are the way to secure stability and to bring about security.

In the 1950s, the doctrine of nuclear deterrence was evolved. We remember the days when there was a genuine and unchallenged "pax Americana" which was founded upon the overwhelming might of strategic air command. Strategic air command, with its B47s and later B52s, was able to ensure peace, and the Soviets, until the launching of the sputnik and until they developed their ICBM programme, were unable to challenge that American supremacy.

However, during the days when strategic air command ruled the skies unchallenged, and provided the ultimate nuclear guarantee which ensured the peace of the world and the security of western Europe, we all believed it sensible, reasonable and right that the western nuclear deterrent force should be guaranteed to some extent by an effective air defence. No one thought it unreasonable that our own independent nuclear deterrent should be defended by fighter command.

I do not see why, in doctrinal and philosophical terms, it should be wrong for the United States to use its dramatically developed technical capabilities to examine whether those capabilities could be harnessed to ensuring some measure of defence against ballistic missile attack.

The outcome of the strategic defence initiative will not be known until the end of the decade, so decisions do not have to be made by this United States Administration, but we can be certain that the re-elected Reagan Government will pursue the strategic defence initiative with great vigour. It is an initiative that has the President's personal imprimatur upon it. It is very much his own brainchild. It is an initiative formed by people of an ideological persuasion similar to his own, and it is an initiative which has the backing of the industrial enterprises that provide the heart of the United States' military industrial base.

Many writings have been developed to articulate the concept of ballistic missile defence. There are the writings

of what is called the high frontier team — Lieutenant-General Danny Graham, former deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and Brigadier-General Richardson, and many others. The growing consensus is that such a defence would be feasible. The question is the time scale within which such a defence can be affected within reasonable bounds of cost.

The strategic defence initiative is being conducted within the context of a race between the superpowers to achieve dominance in the key space technologies. I refer the House to a pamphlet written by the Defence Intelligence Agency of the United States entitled "Soviet Military Space Doctrine". It is difficult for us to obtain information and facts upon which to make judgments in these subjects, but the consensus, if one reads the non-classified journals, is very much in line with the findings of this pamphlet. It says:

"The Soviet Armed Forces shall be provided with all resources necessary to attain and maintain military superiority in outer space sufficient both to deny the use of outer space to other states and to assure maximum space-based military support for Soviet offensive and defensive combat operations on land, at sea, in air and in outer space. Western analyses catalogue a continuous and in-depth Soviet drive to improve on its current military space capabilities and to develop new ones as technological breakthroughs are achieved."

The CIA has recently been hinting that the growth in Soviet military spending has not been quite as substantial as we had feared. There seems to have been some tailing off in their expenditure on conventional armaments. However, there has not been any fall in their expenditure on offensive nuclear delivery systems, inter-continental ballistic missiles, intermediate range missiles and submarine launched missiles. Nor has there been any tailing off in their development of military space technology. The Soviets' attitude to arms control makes this clear.

The Soviet Union was the first of the super-powers to deploy an operational anti-satellite weapons system. It is a rather crude system. Its efficacy is rated at approximately 50 per cent., but it is in service and it is deployed. That is the imperative that drives the United States to develop its own anti-satellite weapon system, launched from the F15 Eagle fighter aircraft.

The Soviets have been reluctant to come to the conference table to talk about arms control, particularly the control of offensive nuclear systems, so long as the United States has been developing its anti-satellite weapon. They have sought to make the halting of the United States development programme for its anti-satellite weapons system a precondition for coming to the talks. I can understand the Americans' determination not to give in to such blackmail and to wish to secure at least some parity with the Soviets in this sector. The United States has always said that its prime concern is to secure mutual, balanced and verifiable control of offensive systems. We hope that this process can be re-engaged now that there is a new United States Administration in office.

Where does all this leave Europe, and what should the attitude of Her Majesty's Government be? My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary referred to the meeting at Rome at the end of last month in which we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Paris protocols to the Brussels treaty—the process by which Germany and Italy were enabled to come into NATO, and the Western European Union in its present form was established.

At the Rome meeting, Her Majesty's Government undertook, along with the other six members of the WEU, to attend at ministerial level—that is, defence Minister and Foreign Minister level — biennial meetings of the WEU Council. The ministerial Council of the WEU could be used to formulate a European approach to the military implications of space technology and the consequences of related developments for the Alliance as a whole. There is no other body in a European context within which this can be done, as France does not participate in the Euro-group.

The WEU has two other advantages. First, it has a standing armaments committee that could be used to formulate the industrial strategy for the development of those space-based systems that Europe might need. President Mitterrand in his speech to The Hague spoke of creating a European space community, and the vision of the French Government is eventually for an autonomous European space station. A building block towards that would be participation, we hope, by the Europeans in the NASA space station. That is the vision of the French, and they comprehend the importance for deterrence and security of some European military capability in space. That is how the standing armaments committee should be used, particularly as the convention on the European Space Agency precludes ESA involving itself in any purely military space technologies, although in strategic and technical terms the capabilities which are developed jointly on our behalf by ESA have considerable implications.

The other aspect of WEU's advantage in this is that it has an arms control agency. Since the conventional arms limitations on the armed forces in the Federal Republic of Germany were lifted, much of the apparent raison d'etre for the arms control agency of the WEU has disappeared. However, European security policy would be enhanced if our electorates were convinced that there was a specialist body examining, on behalf of the key west European democracies—the countries of the WEU—the aspects of arms control that concern us in Europe.

Everybody has said that were ballistic missile defence to come to fruition, and were the strategic defence initiative to prove that such a defence was possible, the construction of an anti-ballistic missile system by the United States would somehow put western Europe at risk. There would be a global umbrella that would ensure the sanctity of the homelands of the two super powers and enable them to carry on their conflict in Europe underneath that overall umbrella. That argument is fallacious.

We have always been in the front line in western Europe and we shall continue to be so. I do not see that maintaining vulnerability and our deterrence posture on the premise of mutually assured destruction is the right or sane way to proceed. Apart from anything else, the danger of war by miscalculation or accident is enhanced if there is no effective defence against ballistic missiles. No one believes that there will be a 100 per cent. effective system. Even if each layer of the three-tier ballistic missile defence system that is envisaged—the boost phase, the orbital phase and the entry phase — had 10 per cent. ineffectiveness, taken together they would mean that only 0·1 per cent. of offensive missiles got through. We all know that calculation is hyperoptimistic and that a multiplicity of offensive systems can be developed. We are aware of the risk of decoys and other schemes that could be used to penetrate the defences. Nevertheless, it

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

would still make a pre-emptive attack a less credible and much less sane policy. There would be virtually no possibility of taking out the adversary's retaliatory capability at source. Furthermore, the danger of war through miscalculation would be greatly diminished if an incoming missile could be destroyed after launch.

Therefore, we must give this strategic defence initiative our full support in Europe and concert our position towards these developments. I do not believe that this can be done on a purely national basis. The Government have rightly given full backing to the revivification—my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary referred to it as a relaunch—of the Western European Union. This is a way in which we can make sense of that relaunch and use that body, with all its organs—its ministerial Council, its standing armaments committee, its agency for the control of armaments and its parliamentary Assembly, which has an effect on national Parliaments and, theoretically, on public opinion — to make our electorates aware of what is going on so that people do not simply talk in emotive terms about "star wars" or make wild suggestions, as did the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), that it would be destabilising. It will not necessarily be destabilising. I should be much happier if a portion of our country's defence budget and that of NATO went to enhance defence rather than to maximise the killing potential of our offensive system.

I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will consider these matters seriously.

11.52 am

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The hon. Members for Ruislip, Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) both referred to the re-election of President Reagan. Recent events in the United States will clearly have considerable influence on the matters being debated here today.

Having recently visited the United States, I welcome the view of the hon. Member for Leominster on the fact that the Republicans have not gained control of the House of Representatives. I also share his concern about the role of Mr. Jesse Helms, which I do not believe will be particularly helpful. The hon. Gentleman also referred to the Republican platform in the election. The Foreign Secretary must be greatly relieved that this House takes a very different and far more realistic view of the Hong Kong situation than do the Republicans, given the complex problem of that part of the world.

The world has changed considerably, even since our last debate on these matters and has become, as I believe we all acknowledge, a far more dangerous place to live in. I wish to make three major points following the interesting and thoughtful comments of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston) about overseas development. First, however, I wish to deal with two other issues which I regard as important—the future of UNESCO and events relating to South Africa.

I am sorry that the Foreign Secretary did not find time to address himself to the subject of UNESCO as there is great concern about our future role in that organisation. I visited the UNESCO offices in New York three or four weeks ago—as it happened, on the very day on which the recent report, parts of which discredited UNESCO, was deliberately and very selectively leaked. Nevertheless, I believe that UNESCO, with all its faults, has been more sinned against than sinning. I understand that the Government are still considering their position. I hope that they will give some thought to the views of the non-aligned nations. The *Financial Times* recently suggested that the Prime Minister had not given much thought to the American position on this but would nevertheless follow the President's lead. I hope that that is not the case. On the contrary, I hope that the British Government will accept their role in UNESCO and recognise that in education, science and culture UNESCO plays a very important role as a United Nations agency. Although constructive criticism may be offered, not one shred of evidence of corruption actually emerged. I hope that the British Government will reaffirm our membership and encourage the United States to stay in membership, too.

On South Africa, I was encouraged by the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey). I have received information today which leads me to ask some serious questions about the Government's policy in relation to South Africa. I understand from a branch circular issued by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire branch of the National Association of Probation Officers that a Mrs. L. van der Heefen, a judge in the South African supreme court, visited an establishment of the Berkshire probation service last weekend accompanied by a senior Home Office official who, I understand, is an assistant chief inspector in the Home Office probation service branch. I understand that the NAPO branch has protested to the chief probation officer.

I am appalled that such a visit should have taken place. I am worried by its implications. Where else has that supreme court judge been and what other assistance has the Home Office provided? South African judges are the last people who should be welcomed in this country and given assistance by the Home Office.

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Gentleman expand on that and tell us what categories of people he would like excluded from this country and on what basis, and why he is picking on this particular individual or category of individuals for what seems to be rather odd treatment?

Mr. Clarke: It is for the Government to expand on the matter. I am asking the question. I do not intend to answer questions that the hon. Gentleman himself can pursue, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am making a serious point about an apparent change of policy by the Home Office at a very significant time in terms of events in South Africa and I shall not be put off by the trivia paraded before the House by the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth). *[Interruption.]*

I regret that the subject of South Africa, where there have been many deaths in recent weeks, detention without trial and so on, is apparently regarded by some hon. Members as a subject for laughter. For that reason, I am sorry that proceedings in the Chamber are not being televised.

I say to the Minister for Overseas Development that that judge appears to have been on an offical visit and was accompanied by a Home Office official. The House should be told whether the Home Office now has a policy of providing official welcomes, assistance and facilities for South African judges, court officials, police and other

personnel who man the repressive agencies of that apartheid state. If the Government's policy is to have no formal or other contact, the House should be told why the Home Office was involved in that way in the judge's visit.

If the policy has changed—this is the central point—there must be the most tremendous outrage. For that South African judge, and possibly others in future, to be officially received, welcomed and assisted here by the Home Office just a few weeks after South Africa showed its complete contempt for British justice by refusing to return the Coventry four—four of its own officials on serious charges here—is a massive insult to the British people and British justice. Will the Minister tell the House whether the Government now endorse and support such contact? If they do, will he tell the House how he squares that approach with that of the Commonwealth and the United Nations, both of which have described apartheid as a crime against humanity.

Right hon. and hon. Members have referred to aid and development. The House and the country were appalled at recent events in Ethiopia and at the television coverage that was rightly given to that holocaust. However, I think that the Minister will expect me to be frank on that issue. The Government emerge from it with no credit. The lethargy that in the past I have been sorry to attribute to his Department I see again today. I offer my view in no sense of conceit, but I think that I am entitled to refer to a question that I asked the Minister on 20 July 1983. I asked specifically what arrangements he was making for "the development of a common policy on the provision of aid to Ethiopia."

The right hon. Gentleman replied

"Exchanges take place from time to time with our European and United States colleagues about matters of common interest in the aid field. Aid to Ethiopia is one on which various views are held and I do not think it would be productive to seek a common policy."—[*Official Report*, 20 July 1983; Vol. 46, c. *159-60*.]

How hollow those words sound today. Nothing that the Minister or the Government have done since the people viewed those dreadful scenes on television gives any of us any hope that they are approaching those matters with the urgency required by the British people.

I should like to ask the Minister about the £5 million that the Government have agreed to give to Ethiopia. Where does it come in terms of the global budget on overseas aid, with which his Department has to deal? In the absence of the full explanation that I hope the right hon. Gentleman will give at the end of the debate, many people believe that the Government are taking from the poor to feed the poor.

Mr. Raison: May I dispel that canard straight away? Surely the hon. Gentleman knows by now that the money comes from the Contingency Fund. Any rational aid budget will have a contingency fund to deal with crises, emergencies and so on. That is what is happening in this case, and it would be ridiculous if it were otherwise.

Mr. Clarke: If that is so, the amount that is being allocated from the contingency fund is meagre in the extreme. The figure of £5 million is about the same as we are giving to two families in the Falkland Islands. It is a trivial amount. Therefore, the Minister will have to be much more convincing in his reply at the end of the debate.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): There have been rumours that the Cabinet, in discussing its financial plans for next year, was planning to cut overseas development aid. I do not know whether my hon. Friend heard the news item this morning on the radio that said that several members of the Tory party were worried about that because it would give the wrong image of the Tory party. That is appalling. I wonder what my hon. Friend thinks of that news.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. I hope to come to it.

The facts about Ethiopia have been known for some time. There have been four harvest failures and six wars. We know that there have been food centres. The tragedy is that if people leave their land to go to those food centres, they help to create next year's lack of harvest. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East said, problems are also emerging in the Sudan and Chad, where there has been no harvest for four years and there is a civil war.

I should like to put to the Minister views that have been expressed by several aid organisations, principally War on Want. I should like him to address the facts to which they referred. With regard to Ethiopia, we are told that the Government are committed to giving 600,000, tonnes of grain when 2 million tonnes are needed. War on Want believes that the United Kingdom grain mountain stands at 8 million tonnes and that the EEC grain mountain stands at 32 million tonnes. Therefore, the contribution that we have been making is flimsy in the extreme compared with the resources that are available. I know that the House is extremely concerned about distribution. Transport problems were discussed in the debate on Ethiopia, five days after the Minister gave me his reply last year. The drought was predicted. Many of my hon. Friends predicted precisely what would take place. For us to pretend now that sending out two planes is enough and to complain that there will be difficulty in landing and in distribution is hypocritical nonsense. We have had that information for well over a year, and that should have given the Government a sense of urgency.

I should like to refer to the problem of the global overseas aid figures. Like my hon. Friends, I have been appalled to read the various leaks this week from the "star chamber", particularly in respect of overseas aid. When Hugh Dalton was Chancellor of the Exchequer, Chancellors resigned when leaks were published, although perhaps they were not published until after he sat down. From this Government of leaks, whose interdepartmental disputes are conducted in the media, it is clear—unless the Minister denies it—that there will be a considerable cut in overseas aid. It will be announced on Monday, although the Gracious Speech referred to the need to "maintain a substantial aid programme".

If, as was predicted last night on the BBC, the aid figure will be reduced by £150 million—others predict that it will be cut by 20 per cent.—that represents a tragic blow to the Third world, to those living in poverty, suffering and dying from starvation. What justification can the Minister offer, as the Minister responsible for those matters, if anything like those aid reductions take place?

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): The Minister is not listening.

Mr. Clarke: As my hon. Friend says, the Minister does not appear to be paying attention. Just as he and his colleagues ignored the important debate on Ethiopia last year, the same appears to be happening today.

[Mr. Clarke]

The people of Great Britain are paying very close attention to the Government's policies on overseas aid, and all right hon. and hon. Members know from their postbags that this is one of the biggest issues to emerge since the start of this Parliament. The British people will be looking for an explanation if the Minister sits in his Department and allows these reductions to be made.

Even if there were not a proposal by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the "star chamber" and the Government to make this reduction, the existing figures do not reflect any great credit on the Government and their approach. It is clear that the Government have not the slightest intention of achieving the United Nations figure of 0·7 per cent. of gross national product. Even now, the figure stands at a miserable 0·35 per cent. Compared with other countries we should be ashamed of ourselves. We are way down the league table. Norway gives 1·06 per cent., the Netherlands 0·91, Sweden 0·88, France 0·76 — perhaps all the references we have had to France this morning in another context will lead the Minister to think in terms of that Government's policy on overseas aid—Denmark 0·72, and even such countries as Belgium, Australia, West Germany and Canada, which did not meet the United Nations figure, nevertheless have done much better than we in the United Kingdom have.

If the suggestions that we hear on television and radio broadcasts are correct and there is to be a cut in the region, it is suggested, of 20 per cent., I ask the House to imagine what that means. If, as some people predict, there is to be a 20 per cent. reduction—we shall wait to see what happens on Monday—our miserable figure will slip to about 0·28 per cent. Obviously that is not only unacceptable; it is going somewhere near the ridiculously low figures of the United States, with 0·24 per cent., and of the USSR, with 0·19 per cent.

In the Government's policies on overseas aid we are really seeing that they have far more to do with the Government's attitudes to east-west relations than with the problems of north-south development. This represents a tragedy for the modern world.

Even if the Government cannot be persuaded that it is morally right to contribute more to starving millions, are they not persuaded by enlightened self-interest? Are they not persuaded by the fact that in Ethiopia there are eight British Leyland trucks on show? They are also on sale in Khartoum for £30,000 each. Why cannot we buy them? If we did we should be giving great hope to the men in Bathgate who are to be made redundant because markets for their products are not available. We all know that they are available and that without the debt crisis there would be even more markets for what our people are producing.

Why do not the Government consider the Dando irrigation equipment, which was put on show at the Foreign Office last week by War on Want? Hardly a few hours had passed when we were told that, because there was no demand for that equipment, 37 men were to be made redundant.

Why have the Government taken such a dim view of the Brandt report? Why have they set the priorities that they have on overseas aid and other matters?

I recognise that the Minister has a responsibility to his Department and is being asked by the Prime Minister to take a more global view. However, I remind him that it was Nye Bevan who once said that the burdens of public office were far too heavy to be borne for trivial ends. If the Minister takes the view that because the Cabinet and the "star chamber" demand these unacceptable and unreasonable cuts he should meekly accept them, he and his Government will reap the wrath of the British people, and deservedly so.

12.15 pm

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): Inevitably the debate has been wide ranging, and the speech of the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) was fairly typical of that.

Eight years ago, in the coldest November on record, I was contesting a by-election in Cambridge. On 21 December I made my maiden speech in the House from the Opposition Benches in the context of a proposal by the right hon. Member for Leeds East (Mr. Healey), then Chancellor of the Exchequer, for a cut of £50 million in the overseas aid budget, upon which the then Minister, now my right hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Prentice), resigned his office.

My maiden speech was on the topic of drought, famine and malnutrition in Africa. It was made almost exactly eight years ago.

I do not agree with the hon. Member for Monklands, West that the British record on overseas aid is, as he puts it, miserable. Compared with a substantial number of other countries, not least the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact countries, it is admirable. The reaction to the tragedy in Ethiopia by the Government has been swift and positive, and it comes on top of 40,000 tonnes of grain which had been sent beforehand. With my involvement in the Save the Children Fund, I am deeply proud of the work done not only by the people of the fund but by other British voluntary agencies in the face of this appalling tragedy.

It is in this context that I find it inconceivable that there should be proposals, as are rumoured, to make reductions in the aid budget and even the funds of the BBC Overseas Service and the British Council. I say that it is inconceivable because we read in the Queen's Speech:

> "My Government will continue fully to support the Commonwealth, to play a constructive role at the United Nations, to maintain a substantial aid programme, and to encourage investment in developing countries."

Looking back at my speech eight years ago, to which no one listened and on which no action was taken, looking at the situation that we now confront not only in Ethiopia but elsewhere, it is obvious that what is really needed is not only preventive medicine, which the Stop Polio campaign of the Save the Children Fund provides, and preventive agriculture but also recognition by the Government that we have an obligation and a duty to endeavour to assist as far as we reasonably can.

looking at the scale of the tragedy which is unfolding and recognising what is being done by us and the voluntary agencies, could not we take ourselves away from our parochial concerns and give the kind of lead which could and should be followed so that we might make some contribution to preventing these tragedies from occurring in the future?

12.19 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Most hon. Members who have spoken in the debate have taken the grand design of world strategy as their theme. I propose not to do that. Instead I wish to go perhaps to the other extreme and

discuss a very small part of the world which, with the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed), I visited this summer as a member of a delegation on behalf of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I refer to St. Helena.

The first problem with such a colony is that people do not know where it is. I am sure that hon. Members know, but the public at large usually have difficulty. Some place it next to Italy. Others think that it is in the Indian ocean. Most people know that it is where Napoleon ended his days, but that is the sum total of the British public's knowledge of the island.

St. Helena is in the Atlantic ocean. It is a small island of about 47 square miles. It is roughly 800 miles off the African coast and about 1,200 miles from the south American coast. It is an inhabited island with 5,500 people of a mixture of races. There are some expatriates from the United Kingdom. There are immigrants from the United Kingdom. The island was a Boer prisoner of war camp and there are some Boers living there. Some 100 years ago, there were indentured Chinese labourers there, and Africans settled there too. There is a completely cosmopolitan community but only one language — English. It is not spoken with any dialect. It is not pidgin English; it is ordinary English such as I am speaking now. If one heard an islander speak, one might have great difficulty in believing that he came from somewhere abroad. Many of the islanders speak English better than I do.

Until recently, the island had very little publicity. The best publicity it has received was the hour-long documentary shown nationally by Angiia Television last August. St. Helena is a colony and we have a responsibility to look after it and to try to lead it to economic viablity. That is crucial.

Of course I would not say that St. Helena is in the same position as Ethiopia. Conditions in Ethiopia are desperate and cannot be compared with the bad standard of living of people in St. Helena or parts of the United Kingdom. St. Helena is not a Third world country. In many ways the standard of living there is comparable to that in parts of the United Kingdom. That is the light in which it must be considered.

The island was settled over 300 years ago with a view to refuelling ships going to India by the cape of Good Hope. That traffic developed and enjoyed its heyday, but it then fell away again and very few ships call at St. Helena now. Apart from the one ship which services the island, there may be one or two calls a year. The livelihood of the islanders disappeared with the sea traffic. When that happened, the island was given over to growing flax for making string which was used by the Post Office. However, synthetic materials were developed in the 1950s and 1960s and, quite sharply, over a period of three or four years, the market for flax disappeared. The fact that St. Helena was covered with flax plants made no difference. The economic viability of the island was lost again, and has not yet been recovered. No Government have yet been able to provide a successful formula for re-establishing economic viability, but I hope that all Governments will continue to try to do so.

There are three ways in which economic viability could be encouraged. First, there is import substitution. Wherever possible, the islanders must be able to grow their own food and to make their own manufactured goods so that they do not have to import goods. The cost of imports is very high because of the problems of transport.

Secondly, we must find something that the islanders could export. They might have some success with fisheries, or with cash crops such as coffee, although more investigation would be needed before a firm proposal could be made.

Thirdly, it is important that the islanders should be trained and should acquire qualifications so that they can return to St. Helena and replace the expensive repatriate advisers. It is inconceivable that there will be video manufacturing plants, for instance, on St. Helena. All half-developed countries—and, indeed, some regions of the United Kingdom — talk about small electronic industries, but such industries will not appear in all the parts of the United Kingdom and all the colonies which want them. Equally, the manufacture of machinery and engineering industries are very unlikely prospects.

However, the islanders could be encouraged to grow their own produce. The difficulty is that there are no facilities on the island for storing water. Below 1,200 ft the island is very arid, but in the centre of the island there is about 40 in rainfall a year, and that is no small quantity. The difficulty is that very little development aid has been forthcoming to enable that water to be collected, stored and distributed throughout the island. There is plenty of land available for gardens, but islanders are loth to try to grow their own vegetables because they know that in two years out of three there will be a drought or a distorted rainfall pattern, and their crops will fail. The islanders have no incentive to grow vegetables.

Water is the first priority. The Government have started a water programme—I give them credit for that—but my experience on the island suggested that the water programme must be extended, and a full programme implemented as soon as possible. We visited the island during a period of drought. Water started to fall as soon as we arrived, but many of the 700 head of cattle on the island were in danger of dying. It is a false economy, and will lead to a lack of morale among the islanders, to start to do something about collecting water — there are advisers there on agriculture and forestry—but not carry it through. The island does not have the resources to see it through periods of drought, and stocks of cattle which have taken many years to build up have to be killed because there is not enough grass for them to eat. Water is the key to import substitution. It should be the highest priority of any Government concerned with the island.

Many schemes for exports have been suggested, but it is unlikely that any non-indigenous industry could be developed sufficiently. For example, there is much talk of lace making, but I doubt whether it would be successful.

I give credit to the ODA for recently approving an offshore fishing survey. St. Helena has one ship that is capable of such fishing. The ship—the Westerdam—is being sent to the African mainland to be refitted to enable it to conduct the survey. I wish that it could have been sent to a British yard. Fish are not especially plentiful around the island, but inshore fishing now supplies local needs. Proceedures for drying and exporting fish have now been got right. One of the island's difficulties is that experts go to the island, make recommendations and leave. Projects cannot then be carried through as the islanders do not have the necessary expertise. Things go wrong, so other experts

[Dr. John Marek]

are sent and recommend something quite different. The islanders feel that one expert is no better or worse than another.

Mr. Russell Johnston: The hon. Gentleman is treating us to an interesting description of circumstances in St. Helena. Can he say anything about how he envisages the democratic element in St. Helena being developed? Does he envisage a French solution — integrating small colonies with metropolitan France—some form of self-government, or something else?

Dr. Marek: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning that. I have given it some thought and hope to discuss it later.

The offshore fishing industry promises to be successful in terms of exports. However, if the island is to achieve economic viability in five or 10 years' time, training and education are vital. Until recently education only up to O-level standard was available. Subjects to A-level are now taught, but the schools are rudimentary. I visited a classroom where teachers were trying to teach A-level physics. All of their apparatus would have fitted nicely into the Dispatch Box. In those circumstances, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to educate islanders to university or technical college level. Because only O-levels were available, islanders were able to come to Britain for two years' work experience.

I was told that no islander had been to university in Britain. I hope that that will change. I saw 16-year-old girls who had just left school trying to teach in a junior school. They worked hard and were doing well, but there is no short cut to having proper qualifications and undergoing a proper term of study. Study to become a teacher, engineer, doctor or scientist is not available. We should provide bursaries or scholarships to enable islanders to attend university degree courses here.

We should congratulate the ODA on having recently approved the building of the central school for 11-plus children. It will incorporate a sixth form. The islanders warmly welcome that development. I hope that it is built properly and has properly equipped science laboratories.

I saw six deaf and dumb children on the island. There is no remedial teaching and no speech therapist on the island. Those children will be a burden for the rest of their lives. Although something should be done from the moral point of view, it should be borne in mind that it is cost effective to provide remedial help. Much can be done to help deaf and dumb children. They need not be a burden on society. Indeed, they should be able to lead useful lives. Islanders have never heard of phonic ears, although they cost only a couple of hundred pounds each. Such distress could easily be ameliorated.

I now turn to the problem of communications. There is no airfield on the island. There is one ship called RMS St. Helena, which makes six journeys a year from St. Helena to Cape Town and back. If it breaks down or if there is a strike and it cannot sail, the island suffers. It has certainly suffered this summer. Yesterday on its way to the United Kingdom there was a fire in the engine room. The ship drifted for about 12 hours and is now near Dakar. Fortunately, no lives were lost. The position is not as bad as it had been feared, mainly because of the efficient action of the officers and crew. However, that shows how vulnerable a small island is. Another ship must now be chartered, which will cost the ODA extra money.

What can we do about it? One might think that the islanders would want an airfield, but that is not the case —perhaps I went there with a preconceived notion that an airfield must be built. There is no general desire for an airfield, although a substantial number of islanders would like one. The islanders would be happy if the ship, which will have to be replaced by about 1987, were replaced by a bigger and better version. A recent report by economic consultants recommends, in so far as it recommends anything, precisely that. The report also suggests that such a ship should be able to carry petrol and diesel, but I doubt whether the Department of Transport would give permission for that. I urge the Government, not just to spend a little money so that the present RMS St. Helena will last from 1987 to 1991 — that would not be cost effective—but to spend enough for a bigger and better version of the ship. If we can get the present ship back into service, we shall have time to design a new ship, which could carry cargo at a cheaper cost and more passengers.

There may be a case for an emergency air strip, though not a commercial one. Even if everyone wanted a commercial air strip, it could not be justified. It would cost an astronomical sum, passengers would swamp the island and the cost of air freight is prohibitive. If an emergency strip were built, a Hercules aircraft could land in an emergency, for example, if the two electric generators in the power station broke down simultaneously. It would be useful if a Hercules aircraft could land with supplies, or even simply throw them out of the back of the aircraft while it flew overland. It would also be useful for urgent medical cases which could not be treated on the island.

I now turn to the problems of immigration and the restrictions placed on St. Helenans. Until 20 years ago they could come and go from the United Kingdom, but since then our immigration laws have become increasingly restrictive and repressive. The islanders find it hard to understand why the people of the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar are not in the same position as they are. I sympathise with that view. There are probably more St. Helenans in Britain than there are in St. Helena. There are two big colonies of them—one in Britain and one in South Africa. It is wrong that a small colony, which has been completely British and completely loyal to Britain for centuries, should be deprived rights of entry to Britain. If St. Helenans apply for work permits, obstacles are placed in their way. The age limit for entry has been increased from 16 or 18 to 23. It also takes a long time for visas to be issued.

St. Helena is not like Hong Kong, nor is it like previous British colonies such as Uganda. There is a good case for treating St. Helena on the same basis as we treat Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands, and I hope that the Government will consider this.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston) raised an important point about the constitution. As the island is not economically independent, most of the islanders do not have jobs. The Government's policy is to give males, although not females—there is an element of discrimination there—Government make-work jobs, with the result that 90 per cent. of the male population is employed by the Government. That means that 90 per cent. of the male population is debarred from election to the Legislative

Council, which must be nonsense. Of course, as in Britain, we must always guard against possible conflicts of interest, and if someone has a job that could lead to a conflict of interest, it is right that he should not be allowed to stand for election. However, for a person who has been given a make-work job and is not a civil servant, the possibility of a conflict of interest must be remote. It should not be inconceivable for the Government to lift the ban, and make the islanders more aware of which direction the island's affairs are going.

The registration of electors is not carried out as it is in Britain. Islanders must go to a certain place to register, with the result that only one third of the population is on the electoral roll. That is not acceptable in a democracy. Nearly everyone should be on the electoral roll, and I strongly urge that the registration procedures are changed. The voting age on the island is still 21. If we have managed to lower it to 18, why can it not be the same in St. Helena?

Much must be done in St. Helena to disseminate information. Before one can ask the islanders whether they wish to be, at one extreme, an integral part of the United Kingdom—as Martinique is to France—or, at the other extreme, wish to have complete independence, they must know what the possibilities are. At present, I understand that the islanders wish to remain part of the United Kingdom, but before we can say that with certainty we must give them some independence so that they can discover all available information and how their process of government works.

I pay credit to the Overseas Development Agency, which is taking steps in the right direction. It is about to build the central school, but it must finish the process. After the school has been built, and children have benefited from it and left with A-levels, they must be given the opportunity to attend universities or polytechnics in the United Kingdom so that the next generation of islanders is competent and professional.

The ODA is to build a new electricity generating station, which is a step in the right direction. However, the island should not be at the mercy and vagaries of shipping. The aim is to have 12 weeks' supply of diesel by 1988. That means that if the supply vessel catches fire, for example, or does not sail, the island will have a severe energy shortage. A tank farm should be built to ensure a supply of diesel and petrol for at leest six months and possibly for 12.

The ODA was right to take a step in organising the offshore fisheries survey. If the survey shows that there are fish that could usefully be harvested offshore, it is important that landing facilities, handling and transportation facilities are supplied. That, of course, would require extra capital. It is necessary that that commitment is made by the ODA.

The ODA has commissioned a report on a new ship for St. Helena. I hope that it will take the matter to heart and will not opt for a stop-gap measure to last the island of St. Helena for three or four more years. If a decision is to be made, let it be the right one so that there can be 20 or 30 years of good transport between the United Kingdom and St. Helena.

Most important of all, the ODA has initiated irrigation schemes and water collection points. So far only about half the programme is the subject of agreement. If we are to make any headway in the economic development of the island, it is important that the full water programme is given the go-ahead and implemented as soon as possible.

St. Helena is not a tropical island. It has faced many difficulties but there is now the possibility of an economically viable future. Its loyalty to the United Kingdom is undoubted. I hope that every Member will give it a fair deal in years to come.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): I am anxious that hon. Members who have been present throughout the debate should have the opportunity to address the House. I know that the House will want also to hear the Front Bench replies. If hon. Members restrict themselves to about 10 minutes each, I hope to be able to call all those who wish to contribute to the debate.

12.48 pm

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): The House may or may not be relieved to hear that I shall not indulge in any further special pleading for St. Helena by taking up the remarks of the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). However, I am happy to be called to participate in the debate immediately after the hon. Gentleman as it gives me the opportunity to observe that representatives from Welsh constituencies now represent about 25 per cent. of the attendance in the Chamber. I am pleased to see such a strong Welsh representation.

I shall not develop the theme of several hon. Members that has been built on the rumours about cuts in the overseas aid budget. I do not believe the rumours. If they were to be of the magnitude that is suggested in the press, that would demonstrate insensitivity to British public opinion that would be hard to comprehend at a time when everyone's eyes are rightly focused on the tragedy that is unfolding in Ethiopia.

I shall address my remarks briefly to events in Nicaragua. We meet at a time when Nicaragua is mobilising and the 82nd airborne division is preparing itself for something. I share the concern expressed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary about any Soviet arms build-up in central America, especially if that involves missiles. However, it is necessary to transgress far into the realms of unreality to pretend that events in Nicaragua are akin to those which took place in Cuba. It is necessary for us to dismiss that thought from our minds—certainly at the present time.

Was the position in Nicaragua so grave for the United States that it entitled a superpower to indulge in destablisation and mining of ports long before the elections were held? It looked as though elections would be conducted in a full, fair and free way. I do not wish to judge today whether they were. The fact is that elections were held that were regarded by many as fair and they led to the return of the existing Government. One must bear in mind the integrity of the sovereignty of individual states, however small they may be. The evidence is conflicting. I have gathered evidence from not only the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua but the United States. The regime in Nicaragua has produced a booklet which states:

"In April 1982 the Government of the United States presented Nicaragua with an eight-point proposal in which were summed up the conditions that must be met, according to that Government for the normalisation of relations between the United States and Nicaragua. The Government of Nicaragua agreed to discuss the eight points presented by the United States if the United States agreed to discuss those questions that preoccupied Nicaragua. Notwithstanding this disposition to engage in dialogue, the North American Government refused to accept a continuation of the conversations, even interrupting the informal epistolary exchange that had been maintained until 13 August, date of the last Nicaraguan communication, which remains unanswered.

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> Having abandoned the way of dialogue, the North American Administration qualitatively and quantitatively increases its aggressions against Nicaragua, utilizing as its instruments counter-revolutionary mercenaries organized, trained, financed, armed and directed by the Central Intelligence Agency (the CIA), and redoubling its political pressures and economic aggressions to the prejudice of Nicaragua."

That is one side of the coin. We have heard the other side expressed more often. It was expressed perhaps most forcefully by Secretary of State Shultz on 20 March, when he said:

> "If regimes responsive to Moscow and Havana and hostile to the United States are installed in Central America, we will pay a high price for a long, long time."

A document produced by the United States Information Agency states:

> "Nicaragua is a grave threat to all the countries in Central America, beginning with its immediate neighbours, Costa Rica and Honduras."

The document went on to amplify that statement.

The evidence is conflicting, but what stands out is the fact that it is right that a degree of criticism of the United States for its attitude towards Nicaragua should come from Conservatives. Although I accept that we do not want a Soviet build-up in central America, destabilisation cannot be the way in which a super-power should react, especially when it is carried out only too readily in other parts of the world by the Soviet Union. It is right that criticism should come from Conservative Members, because we criticise in the knowledge that we are friends and allies of the United States, that we stand together in NATO and that we shall continue to be the closest ally of the United States in the foreseeable future. The Opposition's criticism of the United States might be more persuasive if a greater acknowledgement were made of the United States' role in NATO and if the Opposition did not believe that we should embark upon a defence policy that would destabilise NATO and make the Alliance that much more difficult.

I criticise not just because of the problems confronting a small country in central America, which did not have the choice of being in America's backyard, but because of the effects of what is happening in central America, especially on the United States. The United States has increasingly become the policeman of the world. If it is to maintain that role in a way that is acceptable to the free western world, it can do so only on the basis of moral superiority, and that cannot be enhanced by the destabilisation of the Governments of small countries. That view is held by many of my American friends.

The events in central America inevitably take the world's attention away from atrocities that are being committed by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and in other areas, where it is actively engaged in trying to destabilise regimes. That must continue to be an impediment to peace talks between the super-powers.

I was delighted to read on the tapes this morning that the Soviet Union has given a favourable response to the suggestions of the United States for umbrella talks. Talks will soon begin between Secretary of State Shultz and Mr. Gromyko. That must be right, and it must also be right to have umbrella talks, enabling the overall situation to be examined, rather than being bogged down by arguments about fine detail. I wish the talks well, but we must do more in Britain in case those talks flounder.

We are in an ideal position to act as an intermediary between the United States and the Soviet Union. There is a need for a third party. There is the five continents' peace initiative, involving six Heads of State in the non-aligned world, trying to act as an intermediary between the two super-powers, both politically and from a technological point of view, to see where the lowest common denominator can be drawn in finding the greatest consensus between the two super-powers. The initiative can also be taken by an individual country, such as the United Kingdom.

We do not have the resources for developing emerging technology in terms of "star wars", so we can take a detached view of that question. In my judgment, that enhances our ability to stand between the two super-powers and ensure that negotiations continue. I also believe that our retention of the nuclear deterrent enhances our ability to take that individual line.

It seems strange that, apparently, it is not the perception of Labour Members that unilateralism — far from rendering us more independent and capable of adoping an intermediary role—makes us that much more dependent on the United States. It gives us no choice but to rely entirely on the United States nuclear umbrella as a deterrent. I find the Opposition's argument illogical, and I hope that in due course they will take a different view. We can speak far more authoratively to both super-powers if we are a nuclear weapon state. I have no love of nuclear weapons and would like to see their removal from the face of the earth, but we have to be realistic. Let us at least use our possession of nuclear weapons to good effect by seeking to act as a mediator between East and West.

My remarks have been in part prompted by the words in the Gracious Speech that the Government

> "will work for the resumption of negotiations where these have been broken off. They will work continually for a greater atmosphere of trust between East and West."

We can play a positive role. We still have a fine reputation in the world for diplomacy and negotiations. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has enhanced that reputation by the agreement over Hong Kong's future, which has been generally and rightly hailed as a success.

The visit of Mr. Gromyko next year and of Mr. Gorbachev later this year will give us the opportunity to act as a catalyst between the superpowers in achieving peace. It is perhaps appropriate that we should be talking in those terms when, this Sunday, most of us will be attending a church service to commemorate those who gave their lives in the war. We must ensure that future generations do not have to make that sacrifice.

1 pm

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I am pleased to find myself agreeing with the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) particularly with reference to the Government's statement and the statement this morning from the Foreign Secretary about the elections in Nicaragua. I was distressed about the wording of that statement because it could be construed as an attempt by the British Foreign Office to de-legitimise the Government after the elections in Nicaragua. It might be seen to be covert support for the apparent moves towards military intervention in which the United States is currently involved.

For those reasons I ask the Minister to consider carefully the text of what the Foreign Secretary told us earlier to see whether he can, in the light of remarks that have been made by hon. Members, ensure that the British

Government do not say anything that might be seen to be destabilising the democratic process in central America —the most democratic process that we have seen in a central American country for some years.

The United Kingdom's relationship with UNESCO has been mentioned by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). I received an answer from the Foreign Office this morning saying that British policy towards UNESCO is still being reviewed. It would be helpful if the Minister when he replies, or in a letter to those who have raised the issue, could say what the parameters of the review are and when the Government expect to decide. Those who are members of the national commission in Britain of UNESCO discussed the issue this week and they are deeply worried about what they see to be a trend towards withdrawal in the Government's discussions.

The speech of the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) was another of those speeches from Conservative Members who seem to be fascinated by weapons systems without being able to talk about the political context in which they are deployed. They seem to talk about the deployment of new weapons systems by the West as if they were an automatic contribution to the enhancing of deterrence. They, of course, criticise the Soviet attempt to catch up with that weapons technology as abhorrent and a threat to the West.

We must learn to recognise that no nuclear weapon increases nuclear security. We are told time and again that the Western defence strategy's objective is purely defensive—we heard it again this morning—and that the policy is to enhance deterrence. That is, presumably, honestly believed by Conservative Members. I believe the hon. Member for Ynys Môn when he says that he has no love for nuclear weapons. It is equally the view put forward by strategists in the Kremlin.

We must realise that one side's defensive deterrent is a growing threat to the security of the other side. For those reasons, it is essential that we say that all weapon deployments and potential deployments are an increase in insecurity. In that context, I was worried by the recent discussions that have been going on between the parties of the alliance about the purchase of the sea-launched cruise missile as a new Alliance deterrent. Whatever may be the advantages of a sea-launched cruise missile programme in terms of patching up the defence policies of the SDP and the Liberal party—a fudging of defence policy may suit the alliance — if they decide on that policy without considering the arms control implications of the sea-launched cruise missile programme they are failing to see the grave threat posed by that programme.

I have raised the matter before, and I do not apologise for taking time on it again, because we have seen the way in which the sea-launched cruise missile programme has already been deployed and developed in its conventional capacity. From the point of view of the military, it is a wonderfully efficient weapon. The Tomahawk version can be fired from a standard torpedo tube. It is, therefore, possible to extend the cold war embrace of nuclear deterrence to any part of the world. The weapons can be fitted with nuclear, chemical or high explosive warheads. They have great accuracy, so strategists can spend their time working out elegant, surgical strikes.

Can it be in the interests of security worldwide to turn any naval manoeuvre in any military or political crisis into what can be perceived as a nuclear threat? In international affairs, we have always to look at what is the perception of the intention. Can we increase security by placing the capability to launch a nuclear weapon into the hands of more and more military personnel? Is our security increased with an increase in the accuracy of destroying military targets in so-called counter-force strikes? Do we increase security by acquiring a weapon such as Tomahawk which, if fired in the conventional way, will appear to the enemy radar to be a nuclear weapon and will be assumed by the other side to be deployed on all vessels, and, according to the principles of SALT II, will have to be counted? The implication for verification of arms control of this enhancement of deterrence should be taken seriously.

If we believe in nuclear disarmament, whether unilateral, bilateral, trilateral or whatever, it must be an objective of arms control policy that we should not be deploying new weapons that will make a veritable minefield of arms control verification. I shall quote from Ambassador Gerard Smith, who negotiated with the Soviet Union in the previous American Administration. In talking about the sea-launched programme he said:

> "It is too often forgotten that progress we have made on arms control to date has depended very importantly on the fact that the weapons systems involved have been relatively very visible to the kind of surveillance technology we have developed. This all important visibility may end with the deployment of the sea-launched cruise missiles. The naval cruise missiles, therefore, stand a very good chance of increasing the interdeterminancy of the strategic threat in the 1980s and 1990s and of undermining one of the key foundations of arms control."

I stress to hon. Members in the alliance who may be talking about acquiring new deterrents through the sea-launched missile system, and to the Conservative party, the tremendous dangers in terms of arms control posed by this new deployment.

There is a link between the proliferation of the arms race and poverty and injustice worldwide. The arms race leads to war, but it also leads to poverty and depression. It cultivates nothing except hunger. The poor in the Third world are subsidising the arms build-up of the First world. American militarisation has been financed by a massive federal budget deficit, which has pushed interest rates to record levels. High interest rates increase the cost of servicing the Third world's huge foreign currency debts, leading Governments to squeeze domestic consumption and contract economic activity. This results in heightened social conflict, which is met by brutal repression in many southern countries.

The nuclear military economy leads directly to food riots and the torture of the hungry. The confrontation of East and West is parasitical on confrontation of North and South, as the Brandt report and other reports have shown. Millions may die in Europe in a nuclear winter because millions are dying in Latin America and Africa. The Third world is paying for the third world war. As the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) has already said, the 500 million people who are suffering from malnutrition represent the way in which the south has already paid for the cost of the nuclear arms and the conventional arms used in the arms trade. Monetarism and Atlanticism, the twin poles of Government policy, contribute significantly to this conspiracy against the world's poor.

I hope that the Government will reply to my next point, either today or in a letter. It concerns the specific charges that have been made about delay by the Government in ensuring adequate aid to Ethiopia in its present crisis, before that crisis became a media issue. Serious charges

[Mr. D. E. Thomas]

have been made by Dr. Charles Elliott, whom I knew as a professor in Swansea, and who has recently been a director of Christian Aid. He referred to the fact that the Government have been delaying adequate aid for political reasons. He was quoted as saying that it was the United States, and therefore the United Kingdom, view that a disastrous famine would bring down the Marxist Government in Ethiopia.

I raised this with the Prime Minister on 30 October but she failed to respond adequately. She gave the House the impression that Ethiopia had received more aid than was the case. So far as I can gather, in 1983 the figure was only about £3·4 million — about the same as for the Seychelles. I hope that the Minister will set out the historical position and tell us whether the serious charges to which I have referred are indeed accurate and whether there was a delay last year and earlier this year in ensuring adequate unilateral, bilateral and multilateral aid for Ethiopia.

As a state with post-colonial responsibilities towards the southern countries, the proposed cuts in overseas aid put this country in an invidious position compared with nations that do not have those obligations. This is exemplified by our aid budget for 1983-84 of only 0·35 per cent. of GNP. I believe that the response of the British public to the situation in Ethiopia is not just a short-term emotional reaction to a crisis perceived through the media but a statement that there is still a spirit of internationalism and international co-operation in Britain. The Government must respond to that.

1.10 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): I support my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) who spoke so eloquently about Nicaragua. Having returned from that country only yesterday, perhaps I may give the House some details on what I found there and on the elections. I was there with the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland), a man whom I am happy to call my friend not least because, when I saw my luggage going to Costa Rica when I was going to Miami, he was most helpful in ensuring, I hope, the eventual return of the luggage tomorrow.

Despite its small size, Nicaragua is of the utmost importance in the whole central and south American context. It is an area of great trouble and one of the hot spots with which we must deal in a very careful, measured and considered way. It is a small country and its gross domestic product is tiny compared with many of the larger municipal bodies in this country. Before 1979, it was subject to the highly repressive regime of General Somoza. As a result of a popular revolution — it was indeed popular — a Government emerged who are patriotic as well as Left-wing. It is hard to say exactly what that Government consist of and what their views are. Some have described them as Marxist-Leninist. I do not believe that they are entirely Marxist-Leninist, but to describe them as very Left-wing would be quite adequate.

The new Government faced many problems when they came to power, not least a grave economic situation. Somoza had left no money in the kitty so they had to try to rebuild the economy. The high level of illiteracy has been dealt with by a major literacy campaign. They also tackled the serious health problems, including a lack of doctors, hospitals and so on. To do that, a great deal of foreign aid was required. Cubans are certainly present. I cannot say anything about Cuban military advisers, but I know that there are Cuban doctors and they are desperately needed. If there is to be a call for the withdrawal of all Cubans from Nicaragua, I hope that the free world will recognise that the doctors and nurses must be replaced and that it will provide the aid so desperately needed in that area.

The economic future of the country is perhaps one of the prime areas, on which one must concentrate. The Nicaraguan Government see the solution in terms not only of Nicaragua but of the region. That is where some of the problems arise. It is not only a Common Market solution for central America and the Caribbean, but a social solution, which they see as a Socialist solution. Therefore, to that extent one must recognise that the United States has a real problem. It would help us all to look at the problem in a realistic way as well. That does not mean that Nicaragua is not a sovereign country that has a right to determine and decide its own future, but one must recognise at the same time that America went through the Cuban crisis in the 1960s and does not want to see repeated what was so nearly a catastrophe for the world. I do not think, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn said, that we have reached anything like that situation in Nicaragua, but realising that there is a cause for concern by the Americans would help us to try to resolve the problems of Nicaragua.

One must also realise that Nicargua has been bled by civil war in the north, south and central highland parts, at times coming close to the capital of Managua. The war has been supported by the United States to a great extent in both financial terms and arms and other technical support. It is almost a continuation of the revolution. These are the remnants of the Sandinista civil guard supported by peasants and others in the country who also oppose the Government. War is no solution, and financial support only helps towards the continuation of that war. It places that small country in a desperate situation.

If anyone says that there is no civil war, I tell them that I went to the Atlantic ports, including Porto Cabezo, which is on the Caribbean side, where I saw five coffins being nailed down and two more being put into a lorry. That army is composed of people aged 16 and over. Seven young people had died. Nicaragua has a population of only 3 million, half of whom are under 16. Seven people from that small town had been killed, which means that in real terms the civil war is having an enormous effect on the country.

If one goes to towns such as Esterli, one finds many families in which one member has died, which at least have had close contact with the civil war, or with people who have been severely wounded. They are all involved. One must look at Nicaragua in that context as well.

Nicaragua has been having a civil war, with the patriotic forces being both revolutionaries and extremely nationalistic. It has also been almost a one-party state over the past four years. Almost all the apparatus of state is controlled and held by the Sandinistas, the FSLN, which is the party. The army is the Sandinista army. The police are the Sandinista police. There is rationing in Nicaragua, and anyone wanting a ration card has to apply to the local Sandinista committee. The Civil Service is controlled by the Sandinistas. It is impossible to go into the office of a

civil servant without finding an FSLN flag on display. For the last four years of the revolution, there has been complete control of the state apparatus by the party.

Coming to the democratic state of the country, it is apparent that during the past four years there has been party campaigning. A form of press censorship has also been in force in Nicaragua. In some respects, it is not unnatural to have press censorship, especially when a country is at war, as Nicaragua is, but the press censorship has gone beyond that at times, and it is to be deplored.

However, there was an election in Nicaragua on 4 November, and that election is important for the country. I was one of the observers. I was allowed to observe all aspects of the election. Her Majesty's Government did not send observers to the election on the ground that it could not be free and fair. The Italian Government did not send observers on the ground that the preparation for the election was not satisfactory. I think that that is a far better way of describing that election.

We have to ask ourselves, however, whether the preparation could have been satisfactory in the prevailing circumstances. The apparatus of state being in the control of one political party meant that there was a lack of freedom of choice. But political parties have been in existence for a considerable time. They were not allowed to campaign in the way that the FSLN was prior to the beginning of the electoral campaign in August. To that extent, they lost ground. After the beginning of August they were free to campaign, but they started with a disadvantage.

In democratic terms, I always feel that elections are simply the icing on top of the cake. I would be happier to see the democratic organs of government existing before elections are held. It is more important to divorce the army, the police and the civil service from the party apparatus before elections if they are to be entirely free and fair. It is equally important that there should be a lack of anything but the most essential war censorship.

The election cannot be discounted. For 40 years the Nicaraguans did not have free elections. They did not know what they were like. Under the Somozista Government, no one could be clear that the secret police would not know how one had voted in an election. Elections were looked upon with the greatest suspicion. No one who opposed the Government in Nicaragua felt that elections would be secret.

I went round on election day. I had complete access. I drove in a four-wheeled vehicle into the tiniest villages. I was able to go into any polling station. I was able to observe and to ask questions. People told me that they thought that the election had been free, fair and secret. I found that somewhat surprising. But I feel that it augurs well for the future of Nicaragua that people should have found that, almost for the first time, they have had elections which were secret and in which they can have confidence. I wonder whether—despite the background of the Sandinistas and the fact that the Government had total control of the organs of state—if an election had taken place two weeks later, the results might have been more favourable to the opposition parties. Certainly, people were very surprised. The country now has some democratic history, and, provided that there is no going back on the advances made so far, there is hope for that troubled and divided country.

I could speak about the elections for a long time, but I shall mention only one other point. The lack of opposition parties was considered to be one of the defects of the elections. The PLI — the Partita Liberale Independante—behaved rather like the Liberal party in this country. It could not make up its mind where it stood. It withdrew from the elections but did not tell anyone that it had withdrawn. However, it received a sizeable number of votes.

The largest opposition group was the Co-ordinadora, led by Mr. Arturo Cruz. His campaign was rendered very difficult by the activities of a number of Sandinistas who tried to break it up. But what is not fully appreciated is the fact that the outdoor rallies where the worst disruption took place were held before the beginning of August and to that extent were against the law. Outdoor rallies were permitted only after 5 or 10 August. None the less, Mr. Cruz faced many difficulties and the Co-ordinadora was not given complete freedom.

I believe that Nicaraguans expect a perfection that we do not expect. Mr. Cruz complained that the press did not always report what he said. The press seldom reports what I say. He complained about heckling at his meetings. I have experienced heckling at my meetings. It has been a source of regret to me that I have sometimes been heckled by all the five people who have attended one of my meetings. Perhaps the Nicaraguans expected too much. They did not realise that the democratic process is difficult.

Something very important is taking place in Nicaragua. A national dialogue is taking place outside the political arena, involving the whole social structure and the political parties. The first subject of discussion in the dialogue is the elections that are to take place in a year's time.

Mr. Stuart Holland: Local elections.

Mr. Ashby: Yes, but people are asking for national elections, too, in a year's time, on the basis of an agreement about how elections will take place.

The dialogue may prove to be nothing but a talking shop, like earlier dialogues, but if all the free nations of the world accord that dialogue the importance that it should have, we may be able to resolve the problems which are all too apparent in that unhappy country and part of the world. If, after that dialogue, we can say that we expect that there will be free elections, conducted on the basis of those of 4 November, that there should be satisfactory preparation for elections, that we expect a separation of the apparatus of the state from the party and that political parties should be able to continue to exist after the elections as well as shortly before, that country will be returning to the kind of democracy that we would wish to find anywhere.

1.30 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The speech of the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) demonstrates why the Government were so wrong not to send official observers to the elections in Nicaragua. It would have been much better if the hon. Gentleman's report and that which I hope we shall hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) had been made officially on behalf of the House and the Government. It is not good enough for the Government to sit back and say that they consider the Nicaraguan elections to have been inadequate or undemocratic when,

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

not long ago, they were happy to send observers to clearly inadequate and undemocratic elections in El Salvador. That is a measure of their political judgment of the region.

About seven hon. Members have visited Nicaragua at some time. Each has been impressed by what he has seen and each has been moved by the enthusiam of the Nicaraguan people towards the Government and the political and social process in that country. We must compare what we have heard and what I hope we are about to hear about the terrible dangers and the crisis in central America with what the Government stated earlier this week as their foreign policy objectives for the coming year and the appalling complacency and self-satisfaction with which the Government pursue foreign policy. They support utterly the United States and accept expenditure of about £17 billion on arms and the acceleration of the nuclear arms race. That should be compared with the limited words of comfort for the starving people of north Africa and Ethiopia and the limited amount of foreign aid that has been made available.

We should also bear in mind that we heard yesterday from yet another Cabinet leak that there is to be a cut in the foreign aid budget in the coming year. That is appalling. We should remember that people are starving in north Africa and many other parts of the world, yet a wealthy country such as ours can find so much money to spend on nuclear and other weapons and on supporting an arms race and cut its funding of foreign aid, emergency food aid and development aid.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food told the House recently that, as of 18 October, the EEC intervention fund held in store more than 4 million tonnes of wheat, more than 1 million tonnes of barley and 330,000 tonnes of rye. That food is being stored at public expense to keep up the price of those commodities while people are starving a couple of thousand miles away in north Africa. That shows the contempt in which many people hold Britain and the Government for our refusal to help the poorest people in many Third world countries. In addition to desperately needed food aid, we should also consider long-term development aid and the promotion of trade policies to assist north African countries.

In the Foreign Secretary's speech today and in a speech made by the Prime Minister earlier this week I detect a continuation of policies that support the United States' global objectives and the European Community's continuing to bloat its agricultural policies and to deny food, development and trade to the rest of the world. These are key and crucial matters. The Government are blinkered by their obsessions with Europe and Washington resulting in denigration of the rest of the world.

The Government's relations with other Governments and peoples show an appalling degree of double standards. They have a touching interest in trade union rights and freedoms in Poland, which is not echoed among trade unions here or in other oppressed countries. The Government continue to refuse to condemn the many violations of human rights that occur in Turkey, a fellow NATO country. They continue to sell arms to both sides in the Gulf war and to support the United States' policy in central America. They accepted the United States invasion of Grenada a year ago.

Many people thought that that invasion was unlikely, if not impossible, and believed that even President Reagan and the Republican party would not go that far. But Grenada was invaded. They destroyed what was happening in Grenada—indeed, they had planned to for years. They said that Grenada was a threat to the rest of the world. It is a credit to the people of Grenada that a country of 300 million people finds 100,000 people such a terrible threat to their security. They planned to destroy the social process in Grenada from the moment that the New Jewel movement formed a Government. The British Government have not condemned the invasion adequately, but have accepted it, along with the destruction of a Government who were doing magnificently for the people of Grenada.

The news on the BBC World Service about apparent preparations for military action in central America by United States forces is disturbing. I hope that the Government will respond adequately to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) and tell us what the American preparations are and what the representations of the British Government are to the United States.

I understand that the military hospital of Fort Bragg in North Carolina has been closed to civilian patients; it is normally open to them. That was done a year ago, before the invasion of Grenada. The 82nd airborne division is apparently on the alert. It took part in the invasion of Grenada. There are many signs that the United States is planning a form of military action in central America. What is the Government's approach to this terrible threat to world peace, which we may be on the eve of?

Many hon. Members have spoken about what is happening in central America. Essentially, central America is an extremely poor region, which has been marauded by United States' commercial interests for many years and which has sought independence often. On even more occasions the United States has either sent in its own troops, surrogate armies or friendly dictators to suppress the people there. The list of occasions on which United States forces have been in Nicaragua and that the United States' Government have destabilised Governments in central America, such as that in Guatemala in 1954, is endless.

The area has only 16 million people, yet since the present conflict started 150,000 people have died. That is an appalling death toll, but it does not appear to merit the same anxiety from the Government as do some aspects of eastern European policy. It is disgraceful that the Government are not prepared unreservedly to condemn the United States' approach to that region.

That is a continuation of crass, reactionary attitudes from the United States Administration and from Right-wing forces in America. In 1980, a group calling itself the Council for Inter-American Security Incorporated published "A New Inter-American Policy for the Eighties". It was the background document to the incoming Reagan Administration, and described the need for American resources to be removed from central and Latin America. It described a hatred of many social movements in that region, and it laid down a blueprint for the Reagan Administration. That blueprint has been largely carried out, with the continuing destabilisation of Nicaragua, the militarisation of Honduras and the denial of human rights in Guatemala.

Anyone who visits Nicaragua must be impressed by what he sees. Since 1979, when the Frente Sandinista took over the Government, there have been fantastic

improvements in all aspects of society, including health care, education, transport, the economy, democracy, human rights, the rights of women and the rights of minorities. If those improvements had been in what one might describe as a normal Third world country, everyone would be impressed. There has been a great reduction in illiteracy from more than 50 per cent. to about 14 per cent. Anyone would be impressed by the school, hospital and health centre building programme, by the concept of a health policy rather than a sickness policy, and by the concept of full education for people in a poor country. One would be impressed if that had happened in a country that received massive foreign aid, but Nicaragua does not. It has been encircled by the United States military machine, denigrated by American and European media, and isolated as far as possible. However, it has still made those achievements.

As the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West said, Nicaragua is a country at war. There are shortages of manufactured goods, medicines, fuel and many other items. In all the border regions, villages and farms have been destroyed and people and animals killed. The ports of Corinto and Managua have been bombed, along with several other ports. The CIA is deliberately and openly determined to remove or destabilise the Government of Nicaragua. It is surprising that, in those circumstances, so many social achievements have occurred and that there is such complete support for the Government, as was emphasised in the results of the recent election.

Not long ago the Government sent representatives to witness the elections in El Salvador, where there was a 47 per cent. turnout in a compulsory poll. However, on a voluntary poll in Nicaragua, the turnout was 75 per cent. The results showed 67 per cent. support for the FSLN, and several parties obtained varying support from 13·5 per cent. down to a much lower figure. In contesting the elections, the Sandinistas made clear statements about their achievements and record since 1979, and about what they see for the future.

The basis of the American attack on Nicaragua and central America generally is that Nicaragua is a threat to security and a danger to the American way of life. Not by the wildest stretch of imagination could one suggest that a poor country with a population of 2·5 million could be a threat to the United States. It is a poor country that is determined to defend itself and its integrity, and that is something which everyone should admire.

I quote briefly from a statement on the political platform put forward by the FSLN:

"For 161 years the United States used its military might to dominate and oppress Nicaragua. The United States created the National Guard to replace the US marines as an occupying force, and installed the Somoza dictatorship. After the triumph of the revolution, the United States began to reorganise and rearm the National Guard, using it as a new instrument of aggression and terror against our people."

It explains how, since the Sandinistas came to power in 1979, they have had to defend their country against the aggression of the United States and protect their borders and integrity. Nicaragua is a threat to no one, except the threat of inspiration, in that many other people in Latin America admire what Nicaragua has achieved and will continue to achieve.

It continues:

"In the face of United States' policy of aggression and military escalation in Central America, we have searched responsibly for peaceful solutions and dignified paths for dialogue; at the same time we have unwaveringly defended our national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Sandinista Front pledges to continue to develop a dignified foreign policy of nonalignment that responds, above all, to the interests of Nicaragua and the Nicaraguan people, without encroaching on the rights of other nations."

That clearly states its long-term aims and policies. Nicaragua wishes to be a free and independent country. It wishes to be non-aligned. The United States Government wish to perpetuate the Monroe doctrine of control of the Caribbean and central America for their own interests. Given the seriousness of events in Nicaragua, the British Government should even now seriously join with other European governments in giving practical and intelligent support for the Contadora process, in resuming aid to Nicaragua and proper relations with Nicaragua instead of standing idly by and watching the militarisation of region continue, watching Honduras become the military base for the United States in the region and allowing the American exercises there to continue.

The situation in central America is desperately serious and extremely dangerous. The British Government have a role to play in supporting other European Governments that have condemned American military manoeuvres and militarisation of the region. They have a role to play in promoting trade and aid with Nicaragua rather than continuing the sales of military equipment to Honduras and their close relationship with the militarisation of Honduras.

There has been a desperate effort by the people of Nicaragua to remove themselves from the grinding cycle of poverty and debt into which so many Third world countries are forced by the policies of the United States and other great powers.

Many of those who have been to Nicaragua have admired what they saw. They admire the progress that has been made and the democracy that has gone with it. It is said that the British Government should stand by. In answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on 29 October, a Foreign Office Minister replied that the Foreign Office had attended the meeting at San Jose in Costa Rica on 28-29 September but was not able to give the figures on expenditure on aid. It added that the matter was being considered by the European Community.

We need a change of direction and heart from the British Government so that we resume aid, support and supplies to Nicaragua. If we do not see that change of heart and if we do not join other Governments in supporting Nicaragua's right to self-determination and independence, we might well be on the brink of witnessing another Vietnam war.

Will American troops march into Nicaragua and attempt to destroy the democracy and freedom of that country and embroil themselves in a conflict in which hundreds of thousands will eventually die? This is a critical time, and I hope that the House will at least express the view that it wishes to see peace in central America. We shall see peace in the region only by respecting the borders and integrity of Nicaragua. The people of Nicaragua have had enough of destabilisation, bombing raids and blandishments from the United States. They are searching desperately for peace so that they may continue with their social and economic progress. The House must make its view clear. If it does not, it will be ignoring an extremely dangerous situation.

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

There is much else that I could say, but I shall conclude by saying that we shall return again and again to the situation in central America. So long as the Government align themselves so closely with United States foreign policy in that region and its domination in the region, we shall for ever be on the wrong side of the poorest people in central America.

1.48 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): My comments will have to be extremely brief because of the shortage of time, but I shall record my view about an important subject that has not yet been touched upon in the debate. The Gracious Speech contains a reference to the Government working

"for the early conclusion of the negotiations to enable Spain and Portugal to join the Community."

I regret that the reference is cast in that way instead of "satisfactory negotiations on acceptable terms".

It is remarkable that never have the Government set out comprehensively or in detail their case for the enlargement of the Community. The only recent reference that I could find was in a written answer. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office—my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind)—stated:

"The benefits which the Community will derive"

from the enlargement of the Community

"are above all political—the consolidation of democracy and political stability in Europe. It is impossible to quantify precisely the economic consequences." — [*Official Report*, 19 March 1984; Vol. 56, c. *342*.]

I do not believe that it is self-evident and obvious that the enlargement of the Community will be politically beneficial. Ireland is neutral and outside NATO, although in the Community; France has remained formally outside NATO, although it is a member of the Community; and Spain will hold a referendum on its membership of NATO independent of whether it becomes a member of the Community.

The costs of the agricultural policy relating to olive oil and wine are substantial. We must consider also the costs that will be incurred in the budget, which have already been admitted, with the net transfer of assets from this country to Spain. We cannot quantify the potential costs of the reorientation of the Community towards the south that will result from bringing in Spain and Portugal, and from a potential alignment with Greece, and Italy. There is also the possibility that France, when it makes a decision, will alter the direction of policy-making in the Community. Those aspects have not been considered sufficiently. We have been asked repeatedly to accept as self-evident the case for enlargement of the Community. I hope that the Government are not committed to enlargement of the Community willy-nilly, but will always bring before us the case for that enlargement. I hope that, if the case for Gibraltar is not made sufficiently well and if the extradition agreements with Spain are not sufficient, we shall be unable to support the enlargement of the Community.

1.53 pm

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): We have had a useful and well-informed debate. The debate was not as well attended today, a Friday, as it might have been on another day, but it was of general interest to both sides of the House. I stress especially the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) on UNESCO. His theme was not taken up by other hon. Members; none the less, it was of great importance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) drew our attention exhaustively to the problems of St. Helena. I think that several hon. Members are well aware that there is increasing concern that St. Helena will be neglected and forgotten — much as one of its former inmates felt when he was there.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston) spoke of the importance of the Government following their words with deeds in Ethiopia. The hon. Gentleman spoke also of the arguments about food surpluses.

The hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) and my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) have both been in Nicaragua and seen with their own eyes the problems faced by that country.

I hope that the Minister for Overseas Development will reply to the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) on whether he will release what would have been our IDA contribution for allocation to the international fund for agricultural development.

The position in Ethiopia and in Nicaragua has been reflected by most hon. Members in this debate. Over Easter, I was in Eritrea in the northern part of what is presently Ethiopia and saw on the ground the practical way in which the distribution of food aid can be tackled. It is clear that the real issue in Ethiopia is not the total quantity of aid — there may be as much as 200,000 tonnes of food in Addis Ababa—but whether it can be distributed. The Dergue Government in Addis Ababa do not control between 75 and 85 per cent. of the areas most affected by drought. In practice, those areas are Tigré, with a population of 4·5 million, where the Relief Society of Tigré can and does play a very active role, and Eritrea, with a population of 3·5 million, where the Eritrean Relief Association can play an active role. There are also Wollo and Gondar, with populations of 2·5 million each. At present, 30 times more food aid has gone to the Government in Addis Ababa than to the Relief Society of Tigré or the Eritrean Relief Association.

There has been a remarkable response by the British public in making voluntary contributions to aid. At one stage, it exceeded the contributions made by the Government. It is the responsibility of the House to ensure that the Government are doing everything within their power to enable that aid to reach quickly the areas most in need.

Can the Minister say whether the Dergue Government will respond to the initiative taken by the Tigréan and Eritrean Liberation Fronts, which have offered to accept a ceasefire and allow safe passage of food aid into the areas which are in their control rather than the Government's control?

The Minister has already allocated two Hercules and two other aircraft to distribute food aid within Ethiopia. I should be glad to have his confirmation that they are now in Djibouti rather than at Makele. Unless they are at Mekele and unless it is possible in the coming weeks to use the food aid coming from the port of Massawa, it will be very difficult to distribute food aid into the worst affected areas.

If we are to move beyond the flying in of emergency relief in the very short term to the road transport of food aid, and if the port of Massawa is to be used — it is nearer than Assab, which has been choked by other traffic — there is a specific route available. It is not via Asmara; it is a route not under the control of the Government in Addis Ababa. It runs from Massawa to Adi Caieh and through to Makele. It is in those areas that children are dying; it is there that thousands, if not tens of thousands, of deaths could be prevented. Are the Government prepared to talk to the Relief Society of Tigré and the Eritrean Relief Association about those problems?

I went into Eritrea at Easter from Port Sudan. The Sudanese authorities are glad to have the co-operation of the Eritrean Relief Association in aiding that food distribution. Port Sudan has an international airport and is easily reached. South of Port Sudan there is a base which is being used by the Eritrean Relief Association at Suakin. It takes about eight hours by passenger transport and about 12 hours by lorry to move from Suakin into Eritrea.

The Eritrean Relief Association has about 100 trucks available to carry food aid. They will not be sufficient over the longer term to cope with the fundamental problem of food aid relief, but they are sufficient to move considerable resources into Eritrea and, if necessary—if the other routes cannot be opened—into Tigré.

The famine will last until October next year. It is clear —the Minister has admitted this outside the House— that the long-term development problems of the region must be faced. Perhaps he will tell us now what action he will take to ensure that such problems will be faced.

I found it depressing, having earlier visited drought areas in the Sahel Chad, Niger and Upper Volta to see the way in which the cycle there as in Ethiopia recurs because of the inadequacy of programmes to develop, for example, water drilling and other kinds of irrigation schemes to help agricultural production.

In the short term, transport is the key. Will the Government provide, as my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West said, or seek to secure, sufficient Leyland trucks to ensure that we can reach those areas? Ideally, they should be 10-tonne trucks. It would be feasible for the Government to acquire an additional 200 to 300 trucks. They will be critical for food aid distribution. Or does the Minister feel that he cannot grasp the nettle of dealing with the relief agencies of the liberation fronts? That is the political issue. It is a key issue for the British public who have raised so much and want to see it distributed quickly to those who are most desperately in need.

The main enemies of Ethiopia are drought, disaster, deprivation and death, not the Dergue Government in Addis Ababa or the liberation fronts. If there is to be any practical change for the 85 per cent. of the population in the afflicted areas who suffer so much, the Government must act now.

Will the Government take the initiative to try to reach agreement with the Ethiopian authorities—on what has already been offered by the Eritrean and Tigrean Liberation Fronts — to allow safe passage, without troops, for food aid into Eritrea, Tigré and Wollo? If safe passage is negotiated, can the Government allocate more aircraft immediately to help with the food aid?

Has the EEC Council of Ministers endorsed all the Commission's proposals for its latest aid package — £19·3 million plus £1·8 million for emergency aid and the extra £15 million for extra food aid? What additional resources will be committed by the United Kingdom Government beyond what was already in the overseas aid budget? What share of the budget is being taken by the Hercules programme?

The links between Ethiopia and Nicaragua are greater than a drought disaster in one country and a threatened disaster in another. They raise issues of alignment and non-alignment. The policies of non-alignment sought by the Eritrean and Tigrean Liberation Fronts are directly relevant to Ethiopia and Nicaragua, given the Soviet Union's backing of the Dergue Government, and the Nicaraguan authorities' commitment to non-alignment. This is not being taken seriously by the United States, and it should be.

There is then the problem of the MiGs, which is clearly preoccupying attention in Nicaragua. It is important to stress that the first reference to the MiGs—I grant that they generate a nervous reaction—occurred in a press interview that President-elect Daniel Ortega had some weeks ago. He was asked by a journalist how Nicaragua could defend itself against American attack when it does not have a modern air force. The hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West will confirm that what we saw of the air force in Nicaragua might be traded in for its cash value to a war museum. There were biplanes and push-me-pull-you planes, inherited from the Somoza era. We both thought that the subsonic jet that we saw taking off was a Gloster Meteor, which is just about the first jet aircraft ever built, about the end of the war.

The Nicaraguans do not have supersonic jet aircraft. The Honduran air force does. The Nicaraguans do not have ground attack fighters, nor jet bombers. The Honduran air force does. We hear about the military arms build up in Nicaragua, but the army is not the dominant factor in quantitative terms — it is the militia and the volunteers that give the higher total. We should bear in mind the fact that, in modern warfare, the crucial role is played by aircraft, not the army.

When Mr. Ortega was asked if he would buy supersonic aircraft from abroad, and, if so, whether they would be MiGs, he replied that Nicaragua is a sovereign state and as such is entitled to purchase aircraft anywhere in the world, whether they are Soviet MiGs or French Mirages. The United States has argued that there is evidence that there are MiGs in Nicaragua, but there is no such evidence.

Mr. Wilkinson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the crews for these aeroplanes have been training in Bulgaria for some time and if they have been training on the MiG 21 it is highly unlikely that that country will buy another aircraft.

Mr. Holland: My point is that there is no evidence that there are MiGs on the way to Nicaragua.

Mr. Ashby: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that at the moment there does not appear to be any airfield capable of taking MiGs in Nicaragua? The civil airfield might just take some, but that would be obvious to everyone, and, as far as one can see, the military airfield is not yet ready for aircraft.

Mr. Holland: The airfield on the other side of Lake Managua is not yet ready. The presence of MiGs is not seriously at issue, as the United States is already accepting the assurance that they are not on the way.

[Mr. Holland]

However, allegations about MiGs have been made and may provide a pretext for what President Reagan has described as severe consequences for central America. But in earlier allegations about the supply of arms from Nicaragua to El Salvador, the United States Administration have not been able to provide any evidence. In the exchanges on this the US ambassador in Managua, Mr. Bergold claimed that arms had been delivered on an El Salvador beach. I asked him last week whether they were uncrated, and the arms seen. No, he replied, the arms were not uncrated and remained in their boxes. I asked him how he could tell that the box carried arms, and tried to help him. I suggested that perhaps the smaller boxes contained arms as they were heavier. "Yes, that's it," he said.

I had the same impression that I get when I ask my daughter where half the bar of fruit and nut in the kitchen has gone to. I felt that the sheer invention in some of the explanations given by the United States was remarkable. It is incumbent on a major power to be sure of its allegations if they are not to be seen simply as a pretext.

Like the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West I was in Nicaragua for the elections. I went to Chinandega, Corinto Leon and Managua itself during the elections and I confirm his judgment that the elections were well-run. Indeed, in the view of Norwegian observers the elections were impeccably held, better even than those in Norway. So that is not the issue.

The issue is the context of the elections and whether there was an overwhelming advantage to the Sandanistas during the run-up period. Certainly there were abstentions, just as there were abstentions of some 45 per cent. in the United States election. In Nicaragua, timing has also been an issue. Some say that the elections were held too soon, others that they were held too late. Some, like Mr. George Shultz, maintain that there were both too soon and too late. In fact, they were called in February for a date in November—4 November—on which they were indeed held, and during the several weeks of the election campaign press censorship was lifted.

Having been to Nicaragua three times in the past 12 months, I have pursued the issue of press censorship very carefully. It is clear that 85 per cent. of the material censored is military material or material affecting the incursions of the Contras into Nicaragua. I should make it clear that in our view there is no case for press censorship in any society at peace. But Nicaragua is not at peace. It has to face the devastating consequences of 8,000 to 9,000 armed troops aided and abetted, overtly or covertly, by the United States. Again, I asked Ambassador Bergold in Managua last week whether there was any denial that the Contra troops in Nicaragua were being supplied by air from United States-built bases in Honduras. He said that it was not in contention.

Sovereignty also is an issue. Earlier today, the Foreign Secretary referred to the right of the Falkland islanders "to live peacefully under a Government of their own choosing." Do the Government accept that the Nicaraguans have the same right? Is the Minister or the Foreign Secretary prepared to make that commitment? The Nicaraguan Government are committed to a policy of non-alignment, political pluralism and a mixed economy in basic needs. The economic effects of the war may have cost Nicaragua $550 million while the British Government are giving it only a few thousand pounds per year. The Nicaraguan Government have committed themselves to the Contadora process and to the elections, but as soon as they make those commitments the American Administration move the goal posts, change the terms and put the Nicaraguans in an impossible position. A responsible super-power leads by example rather than by force, by care rather than coercion. The United States is not doing that. When does the Foreign Secretary intend to bring pressure to bear on the United States Administration on these issues?

Finally, will the Minister for Overseas Development now tell the House whether indeed there are to be cuts in aid budget and whether the cuts will amount to £150 million, bringing the total down to 0·28 per cent. of gross national product?

2.13 pm

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison): What I can tell the House will be severely limited by the time left to me to tell it.

I agree with the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) that we have had a useful and well-informed debate. Many points from both sides of the House were well worth listening to. In the limited time available, I wish first to pick up briefly some of the general points raised by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) and others and then to deal with the aid programme and Ethiopia which are my special concern. I shall comply with the request of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston) and try to answer by letter the points that it is not possible to deal with in my reply.

There have been many perceptive speeches. I should have liked to refer to those of my hon. Friends the Members for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) and for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), for example, but I am afraid that I shall have to leave them for the record. I hope that they will be well studied.

In opening the debate, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made it clear that he sees the East-West relationship as the centrepiece of our foreign policy and the problems that we face. I think that it would be fair to say that the right hon. Member for Leeds, East did not dissent from that. He put one or two specific points to me, and I shall answer them briefly. We welcome the tone of Mr. Chernenko's interview with the *Washington Post*, as do the Americans. There are no new points of substance in it, but it seems to us that it is something that is, as it were, designed to help a bit in creating the right climate.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about the so-called "star wars", the strategic defence initiative. We are studying that carefully. The right hon. Gentleman knows as well as anybody that the implications are far-reaching, but the United States' programme is long-term and limited to research. Decisions on whether to deploy defences against ballistic missiles would be several years away. We heartily endorse the United States' willingness to discuss with the Soviet Union research programmes on strategic defence. SDI relates to research in that area, as do the long-established Soviet programmes.

With regard to whether we shall sign the test ban treaties, we continue to pursue a comprehensive ban on nuclear testing, but first we have to resolve the substantial problems associated with detecting and identifying underground explosions. The Soviet approach would

sidestep that issue and ignore peaceful nuclear explosions. Therefore, we continue to work actively on those problems in the conference on disarmament.

With regard to whether the British system should be included in the INF START negotiations, I remember answering the same question by the right hon. Gentleman when I wound up the foreign affairs debate the best part of a year ago. We have a strategic nuclear force. It represents less than 3 per cent. of the strategic nuclear forces of the Soviet Union. It would be absurd, as things stand, for us to seek to trade reductions with a superpower, but we have never said "Never". If the Soviet and United States strategic arsenals were to be substantially reduced, and if no significant changes had occured in Soviet defence capabilities, Britain would want to review her position and consider how best she could contribute to arms control in the light of the reduced threat.

One or two hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber, mentioned the Iran-Iraq war. One horrifying aspect of the conflict is the use of chemical weapons. The House will therefore wish to know that, in order to ensure that chemicals that can be misused to make such weapons do not reach the combatants in the Gulf conflict from the United Kingdom, the Government have decided that the existing export controls imposed in the light of the United Nations report earlier this year should remain in force indefinitely. The permanent solution lies in early agreement at the Geneva negotiations on a total worldwide ban on the use of such weapons.

The House has also discussed Nicaragua. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary gave in his speech our view on the elections. We heard the careful report from my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby). I must underline the fact that, however fair the administrative arrangements for polling were on the day, the campaign conditions left much to be desired. Opposition leaders were harrassed and there was continuing censorship. We must bear those factors in mind.

With regard to the CIA manual, the United States Government, as President Reagan made clear, disapproved of the contents of the manual. This is particularly important. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made it clear that, in the general situation, Her Majesty's Government believe that there is a great need for restraint on all sides in the area.

I was asked about Lomé. The negotiations are on the right track. They are near completion, but one or two questions connected with human rights have not yet been negotiated. We have taken the view that the correct sum for the next Lomé is 7 billion ecu. That remains our position. It was agreed by the Community, and we believe that it is right.

I was asked by a number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James), about the position of the aid programme in the public expenditure discussions which have been taking place. As the House knows, I cannot anticipate the public expenditure statements which are about to be made.

Mr. Healey: Why not?

Mr. Raison: The right hon. Gentleman has been Chancellor of the Exchequer. He knows that perfectly well.

Mr. Healey: On many occasions when I was Chancellor of the Exchequer we announced certain expenditure decisions in advance of a mini-Budget. There is not the slightest reason, as we are debating this matter today, why the right hon. Gentleman should not have sought and received authority to make a satement about it.

Mr. Raison: I can easily imagine what the right hon. Gentleman would have said as Chancellor of the Exchequer if one of his colleagues had anticipated his statement in that way. I do not propose to do so.

Our aid figure last year was in line with the average for OECD countries. It was 0·35 per cent. as opposed to 0·36 per cent. for OECD. The characteristic of our aid programme is the bias towards the poorest countries, and it is to the poorest countries we give grants and not loans. In a world where debt is a major problem, that is of enormous value. It is one of the most positive aspects of our aid programme.

The famine in Ethiopia has moved us all. Television has brought it into everyone's home in a way never perhaps seen before. Even those whose job it is to know and to act in aid matters have had what is happening brought home to them with a vividness and intensity that reports on paper cannot match.

Aid is an area where ordinary people can respond to events, and they have done so by giving with great generousity. The voluntary agencies have risen to the occasion, as have Her Majesty's Government, other donor Governments, the international organisations, the Ethiopian Government and the other Governments of the countries concerned. The charge is made of its being too little and too late. When we discuss a catastrophe as grave as the one we see, that in itself is a very serious charge and it has to be answered.

I, too, have seen the films and I intend shortly to go to Ethiopia to see what is happening on the ground. I do not say that everything has been done by everyone in all circumstances. I cannot say that all has been done for the best of all possible worlds. We have a very important job of analysis. It is a vital job. We have to look at what has happened and what is happening and come up with the right answers. Some of them must be immediate answers to the immediate problems. Some of them mean standing back and reflecting about the longer term—for example, about development strategies and so on.

I must make some facts clear. It is simply not true to say that we have done nothing about providing food until the last few weeks. We and the other donors have of course known for a long time that Ethiopia was at serious risk, even though it may be true that the full gravity of the situation has become clear only recently. What is more, we are not talking only about Ethiopia.

We have been providing food aid on an appreciable scale. In 1982 the United Kingdom provided £5·2 million worth of food aid to Ethiopia. In 1983 our bilateral food aid to Ethiopia constituted 19,000 tonnes of cereals. In 1984 the figure has been 26,500 tonnes of cereals, and we made an announcement a few days ago.

Even more important in terms of food aid than our national contribution is our share in the food aid of the European Community. We all know that food aid is a vexed subject. It has weaknesses in developmental terms, and no one is happy about the mountains except perhaps some farmers. But in famine conditions food aid is crucially important, and the mountains are reserves which

[Mr. Raison]

can be and are drawn on very quickly, although they have to be paid for, as delivery has to be paid for, and that can be a very costly business.

Overall, the Community is providing more than 1 million tonnes of cereal food aid a year. In the past 12 months 117,000 tonnes of grain have been given to Ethiopia by the Community. The development committee which I attended on Tuesday confirmed food aid worth another 25 million ecu, and it is expected that the remainder of the 1984 programme will go to meet emergency needs in Africa—not just in Ethiopia.

That is all substantial action, but at the Development Council meeting this week I stressed the need to do two things. First, we need to decide that the Community's food aid should be concentrated on the areas of real emergency rather than on lower priority schemes elsewhere, as sometimes happens at present. Secondly, we must take decisions as soon as possible about the allocation of the 1985 food programme.

Mr. Holland: If the right hon. Gentleman recognises that there is an emergency and that it is particularly bad in Tigré, how is the food aid to be distributed, and how will the Government contribute to that?

Mr. Raison: The hon. Gentleman is right about Eritrea and Tigré, where there is a great deal of starvation. Our view is that we can best provide aid there through the reputable British and international agencies. The experience of such agencies is that they can work effectively there. What concerns us is whether it is right that there should be highly publicised agreements with the representatives of the liberation movements. Will that make any easier the task of getting the food through?

I am advised that the voluntary agencies do not want to see any spectacular political changes at a high level. They just want the job to be done. We are making sure that the aid that goes to Ethiopia is reaching those in need. I do not want to have to try to do that in a hyped-up political context.

Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones (Eccles): *rose——*

Mr. Raison: I am sorry, I have three minutes left.

The other decision which I have pressed on the Community is that we should allocate the 1985 food aid programme. It is necessary that those who are providing food aid—and there has been a good response across the world—should be able to do so in a co-ordinated manner.

Mr. Carter-Jones *rose——*

Mr. Raison: On the the overall question of donor co-operation, something valuable has happened. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently made it clear to the Secretary-General of the United Nations that we needed a better system. The Secretary-General has now appointed an experienced representative, Mr. Jansson, to co-ordinate the operation in Addis Ababa and we shall work closely with him. We have an excellent ambassador in Addis Ababa and a good team here at home. A machine is being constructed. It will of course encounter difficulties in operating in such a country, but I believe that we are doing an effective job in conjunction with our partners.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on this issue?

Mr. Raison: We have provided all sorts of supplies which are desperately needed. I have had two talks with the commissioner of the Ethiopian relief and rehabilitation committee, and we have agreed that the transport problems must be given a high priority.

The Royal Air Force's Hercules aircraft have been operating to good effect ferrying supplies back and forward. They will remain in Ethiopia initially for three months, and during that period their costs will not fall on the aid budget.

The long-term problem remains. We are concerned with getting food and medicines through as quickly as possible. We and our partners are doing a good job, and the Communist bloc has at last been shamed into doing something, too. However, the vital matter is long-term development. There are great difficulties associated with development work in Ethiopia. We have largely withdrawn from development work there because conditions are difficult and the political and governmental climate is a difficult one in which to work. The Community has run a development programme. Indeed, Ethiopia is the largest recipient under the Lomé convention. We must now ask whether we can get from the Ethiopian Government a change of heart in regard to long-term development that will make it possible to operate effectively in the future. Those are the important long-term issues that must be faced. Our work is important and valuable and it is appreciated by the Ethiopian Government. The European Community's role is of the greatest importance and——

It being half past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Monday next.

Leeward Islands Air Transport

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that his point of order takes time out of the Adjournment debate?

Mr. Cohen: Yes. Yesterday I was tabling questions to the Home Secretary. I tried to table a question asking whether he would call for a public report to include names and evidence of the——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not allowed to read a disorderly question.

Mr. Cohen: I wish to raise an important point of order with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would ask you to listen to it as there has been a massive distortion——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot repeat the text of his question.

Mr. Cohen: I shall not do so. My point of order concerns the existence of a public report that includes names, and evidence of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis's statement in which he said that there are people in national life and local government who are trying to make foul and dishonest attacks on the police.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the Table Office has refused a question, the hon. Gentleman must pursue the matter with Mr. Speaker and not in the Chamber.

Mr. Cohen: That is what I am trying to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have made my judgment. I call Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones.

Mr. Cohen: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think that you should hear me out. I am asking you to consider the distortion of a question that I wanted to ask. I was merely allowed to table a question suggesting that the Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis should be dismissed. That is a long way from the question that I wanted to ask. Will you investigate and stop this bureaucratic distortion of what hon. Members want to ask?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must take up that matter with Mr. Speaker, not in the Chamber.

2.32 pm

Mr. Lewis Carter-Jones (Eccles): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about the development of aid for Leeward Islands Air Transport. I know that the Minister strongly supports what I have to say but I am worried that the Europeans are influencing the decision. The Minister must have an inexperienced young man behind him as his Parliamentary Private Secretary, as he tried to stop me intervening in our earlier debate. I was trying to help the Minister. The Minister is an old friend. We are political opponents but share a common conviction on this matter.

I am worried that decisions in Europe do not take account of the interests of the people who want aid. The Lomé convention demands that when aid is given, the interests of the recipients should be taken into account. The people who receive aid are entitled to state their views. They are entitled to say that they are grown up, that they are men, that they know what they want and could they please have it. The Minister is not a grandfather yet but I am and I know that grandchildren make demands that are sometimes easier to meet than are those of one's children.

The ten countries in the Leeward Islands make a plea which is reasonable, well-considered and which should be met. Someone is standing in the way of that request being met. I speak without notes because I feel strongly about the issue. Between 1939 and 1945 I flew aircraft in that area. I am a member of the executive committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I have met people in the eastern Caribbean who are extremely well-informed and say that they want and need the Super 748. I should like the European Commissioner to hold my hand and fly with me in the aircraft which he proposes should be used in the eye of a hurricane and see whether he is frightened.

The Leeward Islands Air Transport company, the 10 Governments involved and the Caribbean bank involved all want the Super 748. We demand nothing more than that. I know that the Minister for Overseas Development is on my side. Why are the Europeans being so foolish in their first decision about aid to the Caribbean? I wonder whether they are being foolish or sinister. The French are a nice people. As a Welshman I find them nice on the rugby field, but I am not sure whether they are nice when it comes to economic decisions. Does the Minister think that the decision has been made wisely?

All 10 Governments involved want the Super 748. The airline operates in difficult circumstances. The Minister would be frightened if he had to land four times a week in the airports in that area. British Aerospace has been generous. It has told Governments that LIAT want the aircraft and that it approves it. If LIAT wants advanced technology as distinct from appropriate technology British Aerospace is willing to accept a delayed decision. Indeed, British Aerospace is prepared to say, "All right, take the 748 advanced version. Let us support the islands in their need for tourism. If, at the end of the day, we are wrong, it can be undone and the money which is available can be used later for an advanced technology." I have never heard of such a reasonable and generous offer.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): The hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) was courteous enough to say earlier that I could intervene in his speech. As chairman of the Conservative party's aviation committee, may I associate the Conservative party with his remarks and say that it would be wrong if the professional and technical selection of the Super 748 by the Leeward Islands Air Transport company were overturned by the diktat of the EC aid authorities?

Mr. Carter-Jones: What a lovely intervention! It shows the Minister that all hon. Members agree completely on this matter. We are worried that a decision is about to be made that is completely opposed to what the people of the area require.

I repeat that all 10 Governments and the airline involved want the Super 748. It is a very difficult area in which to fly aircraft. In 1979, I was involved in rescue operations after hurricanes and I flew in such an aircraft, which is superb and the best available. If the Super 748 is not chosen, there will be anxiety on both sides of the House and a demand for an inquiry.

[Mr. Carter-Jones]

I wonder whether the Minister would be willing to fly with me and say, "All right, mate, you and I can go together because we have been involved for a long time in the problems of disability and technology". Will he fly with me—he is young and I am old—together with the European Commissioner, in the French aircraft into a hurricane, shall we say next week? I should tell him that the eastern Caribbean requires the new aircraft next week, because the existing one, which has already made between 60,000 and 80,000 landings, is clapped out by any standards. The aircraft that will fly in tomorrow has already done 60,000 landings and tomorrow it will have done 60,000 plus one. Would he be happy with that? That is what he is imposing upon the people of the area.

When the Minister presents his case in Europe, I hope that he will remember that the Caribbean countries need an aircraft that is reliable and sturdy, that can land in all circumstances, no matter how difficult, and that can carry full loads on time at all times.

To digress for a moment, I should tell the Minister that I am not happy that the eastern Caribbean depends upon tourism. However, that is the way that the cookie has crumbled. The Minister and others before him have made the eastern Caribbean a tourist area, and we must accept that, however reluctantly. But having accepted it, we must ensure that the new aircraft meets the needs of tourism not in 1986 or later, but now. The decisions that are being made in Europe are either silly or sinister. Will the Minister invite the responsible Commissioner to join us in the moment of great difficulty when we fly in the eye of a hurricane in the untried, unproved and unknown aircraft which Europe wants us to accept for the Caribbean, or will he support us strongly in Brussels by saying that the aircraft that everyone wants is known and has been operated in the area? That aircraft is the HS748. The various options can be considered and decided upon later to everyone's advantage.

2.45 pm

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison): It is useful that the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) has raised this topic, which has attracted considerable publicity in recent weeks.

The interest shown in the aircraft replacement programme of Leeward Islands Air Transport, LIAT, obviously reflects the vital role that this airline plays in the development of the Caribbean. Development aid is not normally used for re-equipping airlines. LIAT is an exception because it provides a public air transport service between the islands of the eastern Caribbean.

The present company is owned by 11 shareholding Caribbean Governments and was formed in 1974. LIAT is incorporated in Antigua and its operating area covers 15 island states and territories in the eastern Caribbean.

With no scheduled passenger boat services between the islands, air transport is the only means of transport for business, family and tourist travellers. The tourist industry in the region is heavily dependent on LIAT. Without a reliable air service this industry could not continue.

Before examining the details of the European development fund project for replacing LIAT aircraft, I think it is important to establish the role of the Commission and member states on procurement matters. The choice of contractors for projects financed by the European development fund is a matter for the Commission, which has to act in conjunction with the recipient states in accordance with the rules laid down in the Lomé convention. Under the terms of the convention, the Commission must ensure that the economically most advantageous offer is accepted. Member states expect these rules to be fully and fairly applied in all cases, but are not themselves involved in the examination of tenders and the placement of contracts. Member states play their part much earlier when they approve the project proposals which give rise to the placing of contracts.

I shall set out the history of this project. In 1983, following an EDF-financed study, EDF aid totalling £3·4 million was provided for improving LIAT's operational and financial performance with an "immediate needs package".

The EDF project is intended to follow this earlier investment in equipment as part of an overall programme of improvement. It results from an EDF-financed study in 1983 on LIAT's aircraft requirements. This concluded that LIAT's aging 48-seater British Aerospace 748s should be replaced by four new turboprop short haul aircraft of similar passenger capacity.

Following a request from the Caribbean Economic Community, the European Community agreed to finance the procurement of these new aircraft at a cost of 26 million European currency units. Of this 16 mecu would be loaned by the Commission to the Caribbean Development Bank for on-lending to LIAT; and 10 mecu loaned by the European Investment Bank to LIAT's shareholder states to finance new share capital and shareholders' loan to the company.

The Commission and EIB project proposals were approved by member states in February 1984. Approval was on the clear understanding that the three European manufacturers of suitable aircraft — British Aerospace, Fokker of the Netherlands and Aerospatiale/Aeritalia, a French/Italian joint venture — should be allowed to negotiate with LIAT for the aircraft to be procured. It was also agreed that the Commission would engage independent consultants to observe the negotiations between LIAT and the manufacturers. The exact specifications of the aircraft to be supplied would be subject to negotiation, but the aircraft finally selected should represent the economically most advantageous offer.

Negotiations between LIAT and the three manufacturers were opened in April. The independent consultant —Lufthansa—and the Commission delegate in Barbados took part as observers in the proceedings of the LIAT selection committee. In July this committee made a unanimous decision in favour of the British Aerospace Super 748. Its choice was subsequently endorsed by the LIAT board and the Caribbean Development Bank, which communicated this decision to Brussels.

Following meetings in Brussels in September and October, the Commission informed the CDB and LIAT that their choice could not be considered to be economically the most advantageous offer. The Commission claimed that the economic and financial analyses carried out both by their technical services and by the consultant favoured the French/Italian ATR 42 offer. LIAT continued vigorously to contest this decision and the Commission agreed to reconsider its position if LIAT could demonstrate that some crucial factors had been left out of the Commission's analysis. A detailed

economic rebuttal of the Commission's case was presented yesterday to the Commission by the Caribbean Development Bank. Caribbean representatives are planning to discuss this submission with the Commission next week and a final decision on the selected aircraft is expected shortly after that.

I share Members' concern about the problems in reaching agreement on the placing of a contract for new aircraft. When this project was approved by member states in February, it was hoped that the first aircraft could be delivered within six months. LIAT still remains in need of an immediate solution to the problems of its aging fleet. This was apparent during my visit to the Caribbean last month. Everywhere I went Ministers made clear to me their overwhelming preference for the Super 748 and their dissatisfaction wih the Commission's analysis. I urged the LIAT board to present any additional information it had to the Commission, and I am glad that that has now been done.

I understand that LIAT wants Super 748s because these are available for early delivery and will therefore lead to an immediate improvement in its financial position. Super 748s have proven reliability, and since LIAT already operates similar aircraft, their choice would avoid the retraining and maintenance problems of operating a different aircraft. Moreover, I understand that the British Aerospace offer contains a guarantee to buy back the aircraft at any time up to four years after their acquisition for the amount paid for them. This would give LIAT the possibility to consider new technology aircraft as and when the latter were proven and if the airline decided they were right.

On 5 October the annual general meeting of LIAT's shareholders resolved not to purchase unproven new technology aircraft at present and thus rejected the ATR 42 offer, since the aircraft will not be commercially available for 18 months. The airline also has doubts about the operational suitability of the ATR 42, especially over the number of refuelling stops required.

The Commission's task in reconciling the requirements of the airline, the competing claims of the manufacturers and the need to ensure value for money from EDF investments is not easy. The Commission wisely sought expert assistance. Having received the report of the independent aviation consultants on the economically most advantageous offer, the Commission could hardly ignore it. Its subsequent decision in favour of the French/Italian offer was made after considerable economic and financial analysis. The Commission took the view that it could not be expected to re-examine its decision unless objective counter-evidence was produced to demonstrate shortcomings in its analysis.

However, LIAT has now produced this counter-evidence. Its detailed analysis apparently concludes that the British Aerospace 748/ATP solution is economically superior to the ATR 42 solution when realistic assumptions concerning aircraft scheduling and traffic growth are made. In addition, LIAT claims that the analysis confirms that the various operational arguments already deployed against the ATR 42 remain valid.

In recent weeks I have spoken about LIAT both to Commissioner Pisani and to the Director-General for Development, expressing my concern over the problems the Commission has encountered in reaching agreement with the recipient Caribbean Governments over replacement aircraft. I wrote to Commissioner Pisani last week following my visit to the Caribbean. I indicated the concerns of the Caribbean Governments and others who have expressed their deep anxieties about the future of LIAT, for whom this project represents so much. I informed Commissioner Pisani that LIAT would be sending a further detailed economic analysis in support of its choice of aircraft. I know that he will review this most carefully. He has always respected the developmental needs and wishes of Community aid recipients. I believe he could be persuaded by objective analysis showing that the Super 748 offer is economically the most advantageous.

The House is understandably united in its desire to see British Aerospace secure the EDF contract for supplying new aircraft to LIAT. I share that wish, but we must respect the Commission's authority in this matter and the Lomé convention rules on placing EDF contracts. Those rules were designed to ensure that aid gives value for money. Adherence to them is essential to our long-term aim of improving the quality and effectiveness of EDF aid. The House should also be aware that insisting that the Commission rigorously applies the Lomé tendering rules has worked to the United Kingdom's commercial advantage.

Mr. Carter-Jones: We are all in total agreement about this matter. All we want is for the Commission to say that it will make an honest judgment. The Minister must realise that he has support from both sides of the House, but some of us will say to the Commission, "If you cannot make an honest decision after honest surveys by expert people, and you allow your prejudice to show, do not be surprised if the Brits are very unhappy about the way in which decisions are made in Europe."

I shall press for a full-scale inquiry into the way in which the Commission makes decisions about matters such as this. I am in total agreement with the Minister and I support him all the way, but I reserve the right to say that I want a full-scale inquiry.

Mr. Raison: The hon. Gentleman has summed up the position by saying that we want an honest judgment. I have made it clear to Commissioner Pisani that the United Kingdom expects the procurement rules to be fully and fairly applied in the case of the LIAT contract. However, I believe that Commissioner Pisani will ensure that that is done. The force of the debate and the points that LIAT has made must be considered with great care.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 12 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Horse and Pony Riding Accidents

1. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the method of collecting statistics of people involved in horse and pony riding accidents.

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): Vehicles in injury accident reports are divided into 15 groups, one of which is "Non-motor vehicles" which includes ridden horses but excludes cycles. There were, in 1983, 341 casualties among the non-motor vehicle user group, most of whom would have been horse riders. However accidents involving horses, especially those involving no other vehicles, are frequently under-reported.

Mr. Greenway: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that those statistics reflect the true number of accidents to horses and riders, since they are not specifically included? Has not the time come for fluorescent bands and lights to be compulsory for riders after dusk? Should not riders always wear hard hats with a proper chin strap when riding on roads, if not everywhere else?

Mrs. Chalker: As I said, we suspect that there is under-reporting in the figures. It would be difficult to isolate exactly how many of the 341 casualties were horse riders, but we do ask all riders to report any accidents in which they are involved. I do not favour compulsion in this area, but I recommend every rider to follow the do's and don'ts in "Ride more safely", a publication of the British Horse Society, which advises that riders should always wear fluorescent and reflective belts or tabards and hard hats carrying the British Standards Institution's kite mark or the EEC E mark.

Taxi Owners

2. **Mrs. Kellett-Bowman** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to provide compensation to taxi owners who have paid for their licence plate, the value of which will be reduced to zero when deregulation takes place.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): We have no plans to do so.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend accept that I find it disappointing that he cannot help this hard-working bunch of people, many of whom have spent their redundancy money on their licence plates or are looking forward to selling these plates to finance their retirement? If he cannot help in the way that I have asked, will he at least see that taxi drivers are not driven out of business by fly-by-night operators who just skim the cream at weekends and have other sources of income?

Mr. Mitchell: The problem has been caused by local authorities restricting the supply of taxi plates. I want to listen to the operators' views at first hand and discuss the problems with local government representatives.

Mr. Merlyn Rees: Is the Minister aware that I met a group of those involved in the taxi trade in the wider Leeds areas at the weekend? In view of the finality of his answer, what sort of time scale have we for making representation on the wider issues of deregulation?

Mr. Mitchell: Naturally, I was not aware that the right hon. Gentleman had met the taxi operators to whom he referred. It is my intention to meet representatives of the taxi operators' profession. I shall be happy to include any whom the right hon. Gentleman wishes to introduce.

Mr. Waller: Will my hon. Friend bear in mind that it is no fault of the operators that the local authorities have restricted the issue of plates and have therefore made it necessary for operators to pay thousands of pounds in many cases in order to acquire one? Should not my hon. Friend bear that very much in mind when going ahead with deregulation of the taxi business?

Mr. Mitchell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That is one reason why I intend to discuss the matter with the local authority representatives.

Mrs. Dunwoody: What efforts has the hon. Gentleman made to consult old-age pensioners and those enjoying concessionary bus fares who may find themselves without transport and who will find that the taxis that are left are much more expensive than anything they have at present? What compensation will they receive?

Mr. Mitchell: I have every reason to believe that our proposals on buses will lead to more competition, more plentiful supply and lower fares.

Roads (Expenditure)

3. **Mr. Blair** asked the Secretary of State for Transport by how much spending on motorways and trunk roads has increased in real terms since 1979.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): At 1982-83 average prices, estimated expenditure for 1983-84 exceeded that for 1979-80 in real terms by just over 20 per cent., rising from £574 million to £689 million.

Mr. Blair: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is an alarming disparity between the capital spending on roads by his Department and the capital spending by local authorities? Does he not understand that the way forward is not to inhibit revenue spending by local authorities on vital public transport, but to increase capital allocations so that local authorities, including my own in County Durham, can provide the road links that are vital to attracting and keeping new employment?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman is right in suggesting that many authorities have taken money from the allocations for local roads to spend on revenue subsidies. It is partly to encourage them to spend more on roads that we are moving to a capital-only transport supplementary grant. I hope that that will inhibit them from transferring as much as they have in the past.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of us are delighted to hear the encouraging figures about expenditure on motorways since 1979, because it makes the motorways so much safer? However, will my right hon. Friend at long last give proper consideration to increasing the speed limit on motorways from the antiquated 70 mph to the 80 mph, which would be so much more appropriate?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is extremely ingenious, but I hope that he does not treat the speed limits in the same evasive way as he treats questions on the Order Paper. The Government have considered the speed limit on motorways and we came to the decision that I have announced. We do not intend to reconsider it at the present time.

Mr. Chapman: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Department is still on course for completing the M25 round London by the autumn of 1986?

Mr. Ridley: That is completely correct. I repeat that that is our present expectation.

Mr. Snape: What authority does the Secretary of State have to instruct local authorities on how this money should be spent? Is it not more properly a local decision whether money is spent on public transport or road building? Why does the Secretary of State have this sudden passion for building roads in towns?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have no authority, and that is the answer to the question of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). Perhaps I should introduce the two hon. Gentlemen to each other, because the hon. Member for Sedgefield suggested that local authorities should spend more. I agree, but they can do that only if they stop transferring the money provided for one purpose to spend on another. It is to encourage them to concentrate on road spending that we are moving to a capital-only TSG. In view of what the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) has said, I imagine that he will support that move.

South Yorkshire

4. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the likely effect on transport in south Yorkshire if the Government's abolition plans for the South Yorkshire county council are enacted.

Mr. Ridley: The removal of an unnecessary and extravagant tier of local government in the metropolitan counties will ensure that transport services are provided more efficiently and economically.

Mr. Barron: Will the Secretary of State elaborate on that reply? The South Yorkshire passenger transport executive will still exist after the abolition of the county council, but it will be one of the quangos which the Conservatives promised to get rid of if they were returned to office. How will the transport supplementary grant affect south Yorkshire? Will we be able to keep the shining example of public transport that we have had in the area for the past 10 years?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman may live to regret calling the councillors elected for districts in south Yorkshire a quango; they will be elected councillors from the districts.

I agree with the last Labour Government, who made it clear that they thought that fares in south Yorkshire were absurdly low. Until a small rise last year, fares had not been increased since 1975 and the cost of that policy to ratepayers in the area is simply insupportable. The twin changes that we are making will lead to better and more efficient transport in south Yorkshire and, I hope, a relief of the burden on ratepayers.

Mr. Gregory: Does my right hon. Friend agree that by moving in this direction the "absurdly low" level imposed in south Yorkshire—I think that reference was made to about 8p per average fare — will mean an equitable solution for all those who contribute to rates? In the people's republic of south Yorkshire, a minority at present benefit at the expense of the majority—the business and commercial ratepayers.

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When I say that the cost of subsidising public transport in south Yorkshire in the current year looks like being £59 million, the House will realise the enormity of what is happening there.

A19 (Repairs)

5. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the results of the three investigations made into repairs of the A19 road.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1980 G. Maunsell and Partners was commissioned to investigate problems on the Tees viaduct. In 1981 and 1983 Cleveland county council was asked to examine stage I and stage II of the carriageway pavement.

Certain faults were found in the viaduct and the stage II carriageway. Careful analysis of the reports has caused the Department, as a dissatisfied customer, to begin negotiations with the consultants and contractors to seek redress. Until discussions are complete, I regret that I cannot give the hon. Gentleman final information.

Mr. Dormand: Is the Minister aware that it is three years since I asked for an investigation to take place into repairs on the A19 and that the Government refused my request? As there have now been three investigations into the allegations that I made, does that not suggest that the £7 million that has been spent on repairs to the road during a life of only nine years should be a matter of considerable concern? Despite what the Minister said, as the Government received the report on the last investigation as long ago as May 1984, when may we expect a comprehensive statement? Will she give an assurance that the contents of the three reports will be made public?

Mrs. Chalker: I think that the hon. Gentleman has asked five questions. He will be as aware as I am that it has taken a long time for the county council and the consultants to get to the bottom of the problem. There were three different inquiries, not into the same problem, but into three separate aspects to it. The stage I viaduct is

perfectly safe to use, but it must be repaired. Further repairs must also be made to the stage II carriageway. The only works that have been carried out so far involved £100,000 being spent on patching the defects.

The hon. Gentleman is not quite correct to talk about £7 million being spent over the past nine years. That amount of money has been spent over the 18¾ miles of the A19 between the river Tyne and the Yorkshire border. It includes all repairs, and for that distance of road it is not exceptional. As soon as I am satisfied with a further deflectograph study on the stage II carriageway — I cannot say that I am satisfied with the results at present —I shall consider making a statement direct to the hon. Gentleman. Until negotiations with the parties are complete I shall not publish the report, as I do not want to prejudice the outcome.

Mr. Holt: Does my hon. Friend agree that although repairs to the A19 are valuable, at whatever cost, hon. Members who live in the area will find that their constituents will continue to complain unless the junction at Dishforth is improved? When I have asked what plans the Department has for uprating the A1 to motorway standards——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is this on the A19?

Mr. Holt: Oh yes——

Mr. Speaker: Oh.

Mr. Holt: I am very sorry, Mr. Speaker, that your knowledge does not extend to the fact that the A1 and A19 join each other at the Dishforth roundabout. At present drivers may have to wait up to two hours to get past that roundabout. What plans does the Department have to extend the motorway provision so that the A1 is uprated at Dishforth where it leads on to the A19, and so that the latter can be uprated, thus giving the north-east of England a fillip?

Mrs. Chalker: I assure my hon. Friend that I am well aware of the problem at the Dishforth roundabout. As soon as our investigations are complete I shall write to him in greater detail.

Departmental Costs

7. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what further action he is taking to control the total running costs of his Department.

Mr. Ridley: I have established an annual review of objectives and costs for my Department and am continuing to develop its management accounting systems.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my right hon. Friend taking every opportunity to privatise operations controlled by his Department?

Mr. Ridley: Yes, Sir. Already, in concert with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, we have contracted out cleaning, catering and ancillary offices services. In addition, we have contracted out to the Post Office relicensing work for motor car licences. We shall look for every future opportunity to involve the private sector when that brings financial benefit to the public purse.

A564 (Blythe Bridge—Uttoxeter)

8. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is satisfied with the progress on the construction of the Blythe bridge to Uttoxeter section of the A564 Stoke to Derby link.

Mrs. Chalker: Yes, Sir. The main work of constructing this road started in January last year as planned and is now nearing completion. It should be open to traffic very early next year.

Mr. Knox: Is my hon. Friend aware that my constituents in Draycott, Tean and Checkley will be pleased to hear that answer? Can she say when the whole of the Stoke–Derby link road will be open?

Mrs. Chalker: I am pleased that the constituents in Draycott, Tean and Checkley will gain a significant benefit. Until the Staffordshire county council is able to come back to me after the revised figures for the other roads in Staffordshire are worked out I cannot give the final story as to when the road will be completed. It is too early. Some aspects of the scheme are not due until 1985 or 1987. The Doverridge bypass and other schemes are in the programme for 1987 onwards.

Singapore International Airways

9. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what factors he took into account before refusing to allow Singapore International Airways to operate out of Manchester airport.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Michael Spicer): We should welcome a Singapore Airlines service to Manchester if SIA reduced the number of its London services so that its total frequency to the United Kingdom did not increase.

Mr. Sackville: In view of the recent agreement to allow KLM unlimited sixth freedom, on onward journey, rights operating out of Heathrow through Amsterdam, will the Minister help regional airports and the north-west by allowing Singapore International Airlines equal freedom to operate from Manchester?

Mr. Spicer: We have an agreement with the Singapore authorities under which we enable demand to be met by the frequency of services. We think that the two current daily 747 flights between Singapore and Britain mounted by British Airways and SIA are sufficient. There is no question of our discriminating against Manchester, the development of which we fully support.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Is the Minister aware that his remarks will cause disappointment and resentment in the north-west? On the related question of helping Manchester international airport to achieve its full potential, will the Minister take the opportunity presented by the imposition of the movement limit at Heathrow to secure the maximum possible transfer of services to Manchester consistent with the true origins of passengers?

Mr. Spicer: The Government fully support the development of Manchester airport, which is progressing extremely effectively. It has doubled passenger throughput in the past 10 years. The Government are doing everything that they can, through the allocation of capital, to encourage that development to its full potential to meet demand.

Mr. Burt: Will the Minister explain what consideration is taken of airport growth in the granting of licences for international schedules and charter flights? Will he explain the apparent difference of approach between the development of services at Gatwick and at Manchester?

Mr. Spicer: It is a question of demand. As the hon. Gentleman knows, 80 per cent. of all traffic that comes into London airports originates and terminates in the south-east. We cannot help that. What we have done is to ensure that Manchester is able to meet the demand. We are confident that it will do so.

Mr. Snape: Is the Minister aware that the decision will be seen as another example of the Government's bias against the north of England? Why are market forces regarded as being sufficient when dealing with buses, but that ministerial dabbling is called for when airlines are involved? Will the Minister consider taking his right hon. Friend on a tour of the country to persuade him that there really is life north of Watford?

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman cannot have heard what I said. We do everything that we can to encourage the development of Manchester airport, including over the last four years allocating £20 million and, in the last week, an extra £2 million, for further development.

Transport Supplementary Grant

10. **Mr. Bidwell** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with local authorities concerning the decision to end the use of the transport supplementary grant for revenue purposes.

Mr. Ridley: On 6 July the Department wrote to the GLC and the associations representing the English local authorities setting out the proposals. I met representatives of the associations on 30 July to discuss the proposals. The proposals were also discussed at meetings on 20 and 26 July. A meeting in September of the grants working group, under the auspices of the Consultative Council for Local Government Finance, considered exemplifications of the RSG block grant consequences of the proposed changes.

Mr. Bidwell: Does the right hon. Gentleman not understand that any substantial reduction in grant assistance for local authorities will inevitably lead to higher bus fares or a reduction in services? Is he not aware that the public will not stand for that and that they will see through the Government's inept transport policy?

Mr. Ridley: Does the hon. Gentleman not understand that, overall, that which is not paid through capital only transport supplementary grant will be paid through block grant? The decision is purely one of the mechanics of paying the money, not one of the total.

Mr. Fry: Does my right hon. Friend accept that many of those in transport circles welcome his decision? Will he answer one question arising from the abolition of the metropolitan county councils? How will he ensure that successor district councils in south Yorkshire do not follow the current profligate policies of the county council in transport matters?

Mr. Ridley: South Yorkshire will have a joint board to handle transport matters, which will be subject to some form of control on the rate precepts that it may charge. That will provide a satisfactory answer to the important question asked by my hon. Friend.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Since the central funding for London bus and Underground services has fallen by 37 per cent., how can the Secretary of State seriously think that local authorities can use the money that will be made available in view of the other, quite unwarranted, attacks being made upon them by the Secretary of State for the Environment through the rate support grant?

Mr. Ridley: I do not quite understand how the hon. Lady reached that figure, which I do not accept. Large economies are available in the operation of public transport simply through achieving more efficiency. That is necessary if we are to make the cost of public transport support in some parts of the country that which the ratepayers can afford to pay.

GLC Lorry Ban

11. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if there is to be a public inquiry into the Greater London council lorry ban.

Mr. Ridley: I have made clear my view that for a major London-wide proposal of this magnitude a properly constituted public inquiry would provide a well established, democratic method of assessment.

I understand that the GLC transport committee will be meeting on 21 November to consider the massive response to consultation and the many hundreds of calls for a public inquiry.

Mr. Eggar: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the very widespread opposition to the proposal, not least because it will lead directly to the loss of jobs? Is he further aware that the Wood inquiry clearly stated that there would be only a minimal environmental benefit from whatever lorry ban was proposed? Is it not essential that a public inquiry is held?

Mr. Ridley: I have made it clear on every possible occasion that a proposal of such importance requires a public inquiry. The decision will not be brought before the House, so I would have thought that all hon. Members, from both sides of the House, would want it to be subjected to impartial assessment by an inspector. Indeed, I submit all my road proposals, even for London, to that procedure if required.

I hope that hon. Members in all quarters of the House who are interested in preserving jobs in the capital city will urge that course on the GLC.

Sir John Wells: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the great anxiety about the GLC decision among all sectors of the horticultural and other wholesale markets and those supplying the capital city with fresh fruit daily? If this absurd ban takes place, will not the whole price structure and freshness of our food suffer? Will not jobs be lost? Without some form of public inquiry, and even some further and quicker control over that already anticipated for the GLC, we shall all suffer gravely.

Mr. Ridley: I have every sympathy with my hon. Friend's remarks. When we consider that about 7 million have to be fed by deliveries overnight of fresh foods, we realise the immense implications of what is proposed. I do not think that anyone could avoid feeling that the costs as well as the benefits of the proposal should be carefully assessed before it is proceeded with.

Mr. Stott: If the Secretary of State is so keen to have the democratic assessment of the people of London of the

proposed ban, why did he not ask for a democratic assessment before he removed the GLC's powers to run its own transportation system? Why cannot he persuade his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to invite the democratic assessment of the people of London of his proposal to remove the GLC?

Mr. Ridley: For action of a political nature of that sort the Conservative party took the precaution of seeking the views of the 54 million who reside in this country by presenting its proposals to the electorate in a general election, which nearly skittled the hon. Gentleman's party off the ground. When it comes to administrative matters on which the House is not called upon to give an opinion, I would think that he, with his tenuous hold on democracy, might agree with me. Having said that——

Mr. Stott: I have a 17,000 majority at Wigan.

Mr. Ridley: —I welcome the hon. Gentleman's return to the transport portfolio. We shall have plenty for him to learn in the months ahead.

Domestic Air Services

12. **Mr. Sayeed** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he intends to take to increase competition in domestic air services.

Mr. Ridley: The Civil Aviation Authority proposes to introduce on an experimental basis an area licensing facility allowing airlines to serve any domestic route, other than certain excluded routes, and to cease regulating domestic fares. It will shortly publish formal proposals, on which interested parties can then comment. The Government have welcomed the authority's intention of liberalising domestic services.

Mr. Sayeed: I welcome my right hon. Friend's answer. However, does he agree that his policy will be ineffective unless provincial and regional airports are allowed freely and fairly to compete with one another? Will he ensure that Cardiff, for instance, is not allowed to poach work by being given an unfair advantage over Bristol airport?

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his general welcome of the policy, which I am sure is the right one for generating more air travel and cheap air fares. There are no subsidies from the Department of Trade and Industry or from any other central Government source that are made available either to Cardiff airport or Bristol airport. It may be that they are entitled to European regional development fund assistance, but I understand that Cardiff has not made an application for such help. If my hon. Friend has any details of unfairness, perhaps he will let me know and I shall investigate them.

Mrs. Clwyd: Will the Secretary of State confirm that Cardiff airport was designated as the regional airport for Wales and the west of England in the White Paper on air transport?

Mr. Ridley: I am sure that that is correct and I wish it all success. However, designation is not quite the same as subsidisation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is strong demand for more intercontinental flights to Edinburgh and that, at the same time, there will be strong opposition to flights operating throughout the night?

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making me aware of those two important facts. They can hardly arise from the context of Cardiff and Bristol airports.

Bus Deregulation

15. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions he has drawn on the efficiency of bus deregulation following his Department's experiments in trial areas.

Mr. Ridley: Experience in the trial areas has confounded the prophets of doom and shown that in a rural area deregulation and tendering for uneconomic services produces large savings of subsidy, and lower fares, without loss of services or safety.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Secretary of State aware that the policy set out in his White Paper and the proposed Bill will be a complete failure? His Department carried out an exercise, looking at certain transport services, and found that many of them were not up to standard, and most were well below. Will the Secretary of State drop his plans and leave everything as it is, so that the people can have the decent transport services to which they are entitled?

Mr. Ridley: On the contrary, in Hereford and Worcester the cost of subsidies in the trial area fell by £62,000, or 38 per cent., and the cost of school transport fell by £65,000 per annum. Fares in Hereford town went down and the number of services increased by 78 per cent. Under the impetus of this competition, the Midland Red —a subsidiary of the National Bus Company—was able to increase its productivity by between 25 and 30 per cent. Surely even the hon. Gentleman welcomes such wonderful results and would like to see them applied to his constituency, where they would be of great benefit to his constituents, despite his rather grudging acquiesence.

Mr. Adley: We all welcome any evidence that changes that have been made in whatever sector have produced benefits. Does my right hon. Friend agree on the following two simple points: first, that an adequate public transport system is the benchmark of a civilised society; and, secondly, that the elimination of cross-subsidy in public transport is likely to mean fewer off-peak services and fewer weekend services?

Mr. Ridley: There is everything to be said for having an adequate public transport system, but there is even more to be said for having one that operates at minimum cost to those who have to subsidise it. Secondly, cross-subsidy is a strange form of redistribution, because it happens mainly from the industrial north to the south of England and from the centre of cities to the country districts, and from the poorer areas to the leafier subsidies——

Mr. Snape: That is what the right hon. Gentleman represents.

Mr. Ridley: The right way to use ratepayers' and taxpayers' money is to provide socially desirable services rather than to subsidise the bus industry as a whole.

Mr. Foster: Is the Secretary of State aware that no one in rural areas believes what he says—not the county councils, the district councils, the passengers or the bus

operators? Is he further aware that they resent his taking risks with their services for reasons of narrow party political dogma?

Mr. Ridley: I know that the hon. Gentleman has been got at by operators, local authorities and unions, but he might take care to consult the passengers. It is they who will benefit from this policy, and they want it. If the hon. Gentleman goes to Hereford or Worcester he will find that the passengers there would be loth ever to see the policy ending, because it has brought them such enormous benefits. I make it clear that the Government's transport policy is not about unions, operators and councils, but is about those who go on transport, and it is those whom we wish to benefit.

Mr. Bermingham: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take points of order after questions.

Later—

Mr. Speaker: May I say to the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) that I hope his point of order is not an attempt to prolong Question Time. Unhappily, I was not able to get him in.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): My point of order arises out of the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster). I took a note of what the Minister said. He said that my hon. Friend had been got at by certain interests such as unions and district councils. I take exception to the phrase "been got at". It implies that my hon. Friend has been subject to undue influence and that he has succumbed to it. Such language is not parliamentary and it did not arise in the heat of debate. It implies that hon. Members are not allowed to put to the House information that has been given to them by third parties. I am merely asking that the Minister be asked to withdraw the expression.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that the expression is unparliamentary. I do think that we must be careful about our language, but surely this place is about pressures.

Airline Seats

16. **Mr. Michael Morris** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will allow airlines to sell as many seats as they wish within the prescribed flight frequencies.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Generally they are already free to do so. As my hon. Friend knows, however, there are one or two isolated instances where sales of tickets are restricted under an arrangement between the aeronautical authorities, which allows the foreign airline to operate more services each week than would normally be justified under the agreement.

Mr. Morris: Is my hon. Friend aware of the problem facing Air Lanka, which is that when it flew TriStars on the London-Colombo route it was allowed to sell 830 seats, but now that it has improved services to the public by offering the Boeing 747 it has been restricted to just 690? Is that competition and giving a better service to the public?

Mr. Spicer: The only agreement with the Sri Lankan authorities, even predating the 747 flights, restricted the number of seats to 690, out of which 240 per week only are taken up by passengers travelling between London and Colombo.

We think that many sixth freedom passengers have been picked up at Singapore. That may be the reason why the Singapore authorities have given notice to terminate their agreement with Sri Lanka.

Bus Deregulation

18. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the quality of stage carriage bus services in the United Kingdom if his plans for deregulation are implemented.

Mr. David Mitchell: The recent White Paper on buses set out the Government's reasons for seeking to remove the present system of road service licensing and their assessment of the beneficial effects that that will have on the quality of local bus services.

Dr. Marek: Bearing in mind the Secretary of State's answer to Question No. 15, will the Minister explain why, in their proposals in Cmnd. 9300, the Government recommend a large temporary grant for bus operators in rural areas?

Mr. Mitchell: Precisely because we want to be absolutely sure that they do not suffer any deterioration in the level of service they receive.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Director of Public Prosecutions

66. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Attorney-General what recent discussions he has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions regarding civil and criminal legal matters; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General (Sir Michael Havers): I meet the director regularly to discuss matters concerning his Department as well as particular cases which it is handling. He has no responsibility for civil matters and I do not discuss them with him.

Mr. Skinner: Is it not high time that the DPP took some action against people in the City who in the recent past have been guilty of fraud? Is the Attorney-General aware that Johnson Matthey was insolvent in the summer, yet no action was taken — despite the fact that it continued to trade — with the result that the taxpayer, through the Bank of England, has now been called on to bail that company out to the tune of up to £75 million? Does that not compare strangely with the fact that old ladies can be sent to gaol or summonsed for taking a tin of salmon or that miners can be fined for taking coal so that pensioners can be kept warm? Is there one law for the workers and another for the City? Why should people in the City get off scot-free?

The Attorney-General: There is at present no evidence before the DPP of any fraud or misconduct on the part of the company to which the hon. Gentleman referred. It is wrong to say that the DPP has not intervened in allegations of City fraud. In the case of Howden he has already set up a police inquiry, and in the case of PCW and Minet, police inquiries are still continuing.

Mr. Stanbrook: Has my right hon. and learned Friend discussed with the DPP the disclosures in *The Sunday Times* yesterday concerning a certain notorious fugitive criminal in the Republic of Ireland? In that case would it

not have been appropriate to use the provisional warrant procedure rather than go through the endorsed warrant system?

The Attorney-General: Unfortunately, the system under which one seeks the return of someone whom one wishes to try for a criminal offence here is laid down in a number of Acts of Parliament. That procedure was properly followed in this case. The original documents were not completely in order, and the police had to obtain documents which met the case. Unfortunately, because the information was published ahead of time, it appears that the person concerned could not be found.

Mr. John Morris: Is the Attorney-General satisfied that the extradition procedures agreed between this country and the Irish Government are working properly? In particular, will he confirm that he knows of no basis for complaint with regard to the failure to execute the warrant issued in relation to Miss Evelyn Glenholmes?

The Attorney-General: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is perfectly right and I am grateful to him. The proper procedure was followed. The doubts expressed by the Garda were the right doubts about mistakes. The matter was brought back, put right and taken over. The Garda have behaved impeccably, not only in this case, but in others in which we have sought their assistance.

Contempt of Court Act

67. **Mr. Bell** asked the Attorney-General what further legislation he will bring in further to consolidate the Contempt of Court Act.

The Attorney-General: None, Sir.

Mr. Bell: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not feel that it is fitting to bring in legislation to prevent the Attorney-General from going on Radio 4 and discanting on possible sentences for contempt of court by Mr. Arthur Scargill, or telling the nation why he proposes to prosecute a senior civil servant for disclosing matters "which I say he had no right to disclose"?
Is this not a case of "Physician, heal thyself."?

The Attorney-General: I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman, who wrote to me on that topic, would at least have taken the trouble to obtain the transcript of both occasions. The occasion involving Mr. Arthur Scargill was one when I was asked to explain, contrary to what Mr. Scargill had been maintaining, that this was a case, brought by two Yorkshire miners arising out of a breach of contract, about the rights of any member of any club, association or trade union when those in charge of that organisation are breaking the law. That is what I was asked to explain, and I did. During my explanation I made comments that came nowhere near the comments that have been made.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me about the case of Mr. Ponting. The question arose out of the publication of a book by Professor Edwards and as a result of many allegations that I had consulted my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, which was totally untrue. I was asked why I had not consulted in this case. I said: "It didn't strike me as something which was necessary. In this particular case—and again I've got to be very careful because it's coming up—it was simply a question of a very senior civil servant who had disclosed matters which I say he had no right to disclose. But that would be a matter for the court. That is the basis of the prosecution." That was the basis of the prosecution as published at the committal proceedings that preceded that interview.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that most of his right hon. and hon. Friends believe that all that he did in the case of Mr. Scargill was to outline the powers available to the court and emphasise that it was entirely a matter for the court? That seems in no way objectionable.

The Attorney-General: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I was asked what the various powers were, and I answered. I was then asked in terms, "Can Mr. Scargill be sent to prison?" and I said that that was one of the powers that were open to the court, but that it would be a matter entirely for the court.

Mr. John Morris: Does the Attorney-General agree that, in commenting as he did on the Ponting case on Radio 4, he has caused difficulty, particularly to the House, because, having regard to the ruling of Mr. Speaker, I cannot ask him to confirm here what he said outside? Therefore, would it not be more prudent if the Attorney-General did not comment on cases before the courts and bore in mind the limitations that we have here in questioning him on any statement that he makes outside?

The Attorney-General: The problem is this. That was a tiny part of quite a long interview. The whole programme took half an hour. I was asked in particular by the interviewer, who is reputable and highly respected, about Professor Edwards' comments on the duties of a Law Officer. That comment was purely incidental. What we were seeking to do was to discuss whether consultation had, or should have, taken place, or why it did not take place with other Ministers. That is what it was all about.

Official Secrets Act

68. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on his policy on prosecuting civil servants for breaches of the Official Secrets Act.

The Attorney-General: I described the relevant considerations fully in my reply to the hon. Gentleman on 9 April this year.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Attorney-General aware of the considerable disquiet over the action that he took involving a very senior civil servant? Is he further aware that when the case of Mr. Ponting is no longer sub judice he will be expected to come to the House and make a full statement justifying the action that he took?

The Attorney-General: It would be impossible for anybody to be unaware of the considerable disquiet about my decision, since practically every newspaper and every radio and television broadcast on the subject has gone on and on about it. With the notable exception of the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), it has all been one way. Of course the hon. Gentleman is right. Once the case has been disposed of I shall have to answer for my decision here, and I am not frightened to do it.

Sir William van Straubenzee: Having had the advantage of watching my right hon. and learned Friend at work as Solicitor-General, am I correct in understanding that in this, as in other matters, his function is to make a judicial decision entirely independent of his membership of the Government? Does he agree that that task, however

difficult it may be, has been achieved by successive holders of his office from all political parties? Is he aware that many of us are quite satisfied that that is exactly what he has done in this case?

The Attorney-General: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That policy was laid down shortly after the war by Sir Hartley Shawcross and I believe that it has been faithfully followed by all Law Officers since. The policy is clear and simple. It is to consider each case on its merits and to consider the public interest aspect of it. Official Secrets Act cases are no different from any others.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

UNESCO

71. **Dr. Twinn** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is satisfied with the outcome of the recent meeting of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation executive board.

73. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is satisfied with the improvement in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation since the Minister for Overseas Development wrote to the secretary general six months ago.

77. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards achieving reforms in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

78. **Mr. Moynihan** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the Government's intentions regarding the United Kingdom's continuing membership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison): Some progress has been made, but much remains to be done. The executive board approved various reforms which, if properly implemented, would improve UNESCO. I am now considering with my colleagues the question of the United Kingdom's continuing membership.

Dr. Twinn: Given the growing disquiet about UNESCO, does my right hon. Friend feel that that organisation is now making sufficient progress towards producing programmes that are of real, practical benefit to member states rather than of a purely party political nature? Does he agree that if such progress does not occur the case for withdrawal will become unanswerable?

Mr. Raison: Some progress has been made with programmes, but there has not been nearly enough so far. We need to see something very solid. That is one of the important considerations in our review of UNESCO.

Mr. Jessel: Why should one more penny of British taxpayers' money go to a bloated international bureaucracy, which is incompetent and highly political, wastes a great deal of money and is hostile to the West in general and to Britain in particular? Cannot some way be found to give the money to Ethiopia instead?

Mr. Raison: We are considering very carefully the many criticisms that have been made of UNESCO. We are getting on with that. We shall come to a view and we shall inform the House of that view.

Mr. Moynihan: While I am strongly of the view that the Government should be working towards, rather than away from, the United Nations 0·7 per cent. target for aid and that any cuts in the overseas budget would cause widespread concern in the House, does my right hon. Friend agree that the criterion for UNESCO aid disbursements should be effective distribution to recipients and that conditions for improved performance should be tied to a declared intention to withdraw, to be implemented if, and only if, such improvements are not forthcoming by the end of next year?

Mr. Raison: In all our considerations of UNESCO we attach very high priority to effectiveness and we do not have very much regard for some of the words spoken under its auspices.

Mr. Johnston: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm from his own party experience that an organisation is more easily changed from within?

Mr. Raison: In coming to a view as to whether or not it is right to give notice it is important to consider whether reform can most effectively be achieved from within. If we gave a year's notice, however, we could continue with the reform process, at any rate until our membership was terminated.

Dame Judith Hart: As UNESCO is one of the major United Nations development institutions, does the Minister agree that it is his duty not just to inform the House of any decision that he makes but to consult the House before any final decision is made? Will he undertake to do that?

Mr. Raison: Hon. Members can put their views to me as strongly as they wish. There is no difficulty about that. I should point out to the right hon. Lady, however, that UNESCO itself and its director-general like to stress that it should not be regarded simply as a development organisation.

Mr. Barnett: While we accept that the Minister is investigating the issue carefully and that there are grave reservations about the way in which UNESCO is being run, does he recognise that Britain's withdrawal, along with that of the United States, would cause grave dismay in the Third world? What assistance is he seeking from Third world countries to solve the problem?

Mr. Raison: Obviously some people would be worried if we withdrew. Others would say that to give notice of withdrawal would be an effective way of keeping up pressure.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: To what extent will the Minister take note of the decision of the national commission of UNESCO last week that it wanted the United Kingdom to remain part of the organisation?

Mr. Raison: As I presided over that meeting, I am in a good position to know what the commission said and to consider it carefully.

Mr. Tom Clarke: In addition to taking account of the views of the national commission, does the Minister recall that 25 human rights organisations took the same view?

Does he agree that we should remain a member, bearing in mind those views and the views of non-aligned nations, rather than appear to hang on to American coat tails?

Mr. Raison: I am as aware as anybody of the many opinions being expressed on the matter, which arise from two different points of view. We shall consider with the utmost care the various representations and points of view in reaching our decision.

Sir Peter Blaker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that when I led the British Government delegation to the UNESCO general conference in Belgrade a few years ago it became clear to me that the organisation was inefficient, grossly overstaffed at its Paris headquarters at the expense of it activities in the field and, contrary to the intentions of its founders, that it often indulged in political measures at the expense of the free world? Will he consider seriously the suggestion put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan), that we should give notice of withdrawal now, thus keeping the position open at the end of next year?

Mr. Raison: My right hon. Friend has great experience in this matter. We are considering with great care his views and the views of those who think as he does.

Disaster Relief

72. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for improving the international co-ordination of disaster relief.

75. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives he proposes to take to encourage the setting up of an effective international task force to help people on the outbreak of famine and after other major catastrophes.

Mr. Raison: I am not convinced that a new international body is needed. It may be that in relation to a particular crisis there is a need for special co-ordination beyond the role played by the United Nations disaster relief office, supported by other United Nations' agencies. In the case of Ethiopia, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been in touch with the United Nations' secretary-general about special co-ordination requirements. He recently announced the appointment of Mr. Kurt Jansson, as assistant secretary-general for emergency operations in Ethiopia.

Mr. Howarth: I note what my right hon. Friend says, and I know of his strong humanitarian concern, but does he agree that it is utterly unacceptable that, whenever a great disaster occurs, whether it is famine, as in Ethiopia and sub-Saharan Africa now, or flood or earthquake, the fortunate nations of the world lack remotely adequate contingency plans to give help? Will the Government do everything in their power to ensure that the existing institutional arrangements are overhauled so that in future we shall have an effective international disaster relief agency, which is properly prepared to deal with crises and which has all the resources necessary to get help to the relevant areas rapidly and on an adequate scale?

Mr. Raison: I agree with my hon. Friend that we must be absolutely certain that we have the right mechanism for dealing with the disasters which the world must, sadly, face. I do not believe that a new organisation is necessarily the right answer. It is essential that we have proper plans to ensure that we can distribute aid when we are faced with such problems.

Mr. Chapman: I appreciate the work done by the United Nations disaster relief organisation, but, bearing in mind the outbreak of famine in Ethiopia and other African countries, does my right hon. Friend agree that the UN should be given more resources and greater responsibilities —for example, the gathering, storing and distributing of surplus food—if it is to do its job effectively?

Mr. Raison: There has been much talk about whether it is a good idea to have stockpiles. Having stockpiles in every area that might need them could be hideously expensive, but we must find the right answer. The world food programme projections for the arrival of grain at the port of Assab are 61,000 tonnes in December, 53,000 tonnes in January and 57,000 tonnes in February. Food is now being sent inland from Assab at the rate of 3,000 tonnes a day. That is a considerable quantity of food.

Mr. Buchan: Is not the point that we already have the stockpile? If we are looking for an international organisation, we have the Common Market, which has grain coming out of its ears. Will the Minister use his best efforts to ensure that the food is distributed quickly and will he remind his friend, the leader of the Tory group in Europe—Sir Henry Plumb—that we do not accept his cynical comment that grain stores should be sold? They have already been paid for and should be sent off to market.

Mr. Raison: It is essential to find the most effective way in which to handle the problem. I am committed to that. We have seen that food can be got hold of quickly, as can other emergency equipment. We are not suffering from a bottleneck in supplies.

The Economy

3.32 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement. As is now customary, I am laying before the House today an autumn statement which contains the Government's outline public expenditure plans for 1985-86, proposals for national insurance contributions next year and the forecast of economic prospects for 1985 required by the Industry Act 1975.

The Government remain committed to reducing taxation, and therefore to keeping firm control over Government spending. Following this year's public expenditure review, the public expenditure planning total for next year, 1985-86, has been set at £132 billion. As the House will recall, this is within the provisional figure for 1985-86 published in the public expenditure White Paper in February. The Government have thus succeeded for the third year running in holding the planning total to the level announced in previous White Papers.

After allowing for inflation, public expenditure next year is planned to be broadly the same as was planned for this year, and below the likely outturn for this year, which has been inflated by the cost of maintaining electricity supplies during the coal strike. With the economy continuing to expand, public expenditure as a percentage of national output should fall next year to its lowest level for six years. The revised plans contain a reserve for contingencies of £3 billion. This is £¾ billion less than the provisional reserve for 1985-86 allowed for in the February White Paper, when departmental spending plans for 1985-86 were less well defined, but £¼ billion more than this year's reserve.

The allocation of this £¾ billion to specific expenditure programmes, coupled with an increase in forecast receipts from the privatisation programme, has enabled most, though not all, programmes to show an increase in spending over the White Paper figures.

But to contain these increases to dimensions compatible with the overall £132 billion planning total has required some hard decisions. Thus, there will be increased spending on the National Health Service, but individual health authorities will be expected to become more efficient and to absorb any pay and price increases within the money made available to them. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has already announced important measures to cut costs by limitations on NHS prescribing, and there will have to be increases in charges.

Again, spending on social security will increase, but to contain the scale of the increase my right hon. Friend will be announcing a number of new measures, including substantial savings in supplementary benefit provision for board and lodgings claimants. The 5 per cent. abatement of invalidity pension which has applied since 1980 will, however, be restored from next November.

Yet again, there will be increased provision for education, partly offset by a reduction in spending on student grants.

By contrast, because fewer young people than expected have needed to take up places on the youth training scheme, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment is able to apply some of the consequential savings to expand other employment and training measures, including the enterprise allowance scheme, within a reduced overall total. My right hon. Friend will be announcing his new proposals to the House later this afternoon.

Other programmes to have reduced provision include domestic assistance to agriculture and housing.

Fuller details of these and other changes are contained in the autumn statement itself. — [HON. MEMBERS: "Now."] Hon. Members will have an opportunity to ask questions in a moment.

I should add that the Treasury will be making its own contribution to the need for savings. The £1 coin has 50 times the life of the note, yet costs less than twice as much to produce. Accordingly, I have instructed the Bank of England to cease issuing £1 notes after the end of this year, although the note will continue to be legal tender for at least a year. This will save £3 million of public expenditure in the first year alone.

It may be for the convenience of the House if I take this opportunity to announce two other changes in the currency —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to give the Chancellor of the Exchequer a fair hearing. All these matters are debatable later on today and tomorrow.

Mr. Lawson: First, and subject to approval by the Privy Council, the ½p, which has not been issued since 29 March this year, will cease to be legal tender after 31 December. Secondly, on Thursday of this week the Bank of England will be issuing a new version of the £20 note which should be more difficult to forge—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Chancellor has several more pages of his statement to get through—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Lawson: The Opposition may well laugh now——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Lest that last remark of mine should be thought to have been any reflection on what the right hon. Gentleman was saying, I hasten to say that I made the comment simply because I did not want too much of the time of the House taken up by interruptions of this kind.

Mr. Lawson: This year's review of expenditure plans has, as usual, also covered the Government's public spending plans for the two later years, 1986-87 and 1987-88. The details will be published in the usual way, in next year's public expenditure White Paper. They will show that total public spending is planned to remain broadly constant in real terms right up to 1987-88, which implies a continuing steady reduction as a proportion of the gross domestic product.

I now turn to national insurance contributions. The Government have conducted the usual autumn review of contributions in the light of advice from the Government Actuary on the prospective income and expenditure of the national insurance fund.

As last year, we have decided to reduce the taxpayer's contribution to the fund — the so-called Treasury supplement—by 2 per cent., bringing it down to 9 per cent. But this will not require any corresponding increase in contribution rates. Thus, the full class 1 rate will remain unchanged at 9 per cent. for employees and 10·45 per cent. for employers. In addition, employers will be relieved of

the burden of contributions on payments under the statutory sick pay scheme, which in due course will be extended to cover the first 28 weeks of sickness.

As usual, the earnings limit will need to be increased broadly in line with inflation. From next April, the lower earnings limit will rise to £35·50 a week and the upper earnings limit to £265 a week.

Next year, of course, employers will enjoy the full benefit of the abolition of the national insurance surcharge, which took effect only last month. Taking this into account, the total burden on employers in 1985-86 is expected to be significantly less in real terms than in the current year, 1984-85, despite a rising labour force.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services will this afternoon announce details of the changes in the Social Security (Contributions, Re-Rating) (No. 2) Order 1984, and will lay before Parliament the accompanying report by the Government Actuary.

Finally, I turn to the Industry Act forecast. Since the Budget, the economy has had to endure a number of testing developments, both at home and abroad, of a sort which not so long ago would have driven it off course. This time, they have not done so.

Monetary growth has been in line with the targets I set at the time of the Budget, and inflation has remained low: perhaps 4·75 per cent. in the last quarter of this year.

Total national output, which reached its highest level ever last year, looks set to rise by a further 2·5 per cent. this year. Had it not been for the coal strike, growth this year would probably have been 3·5 per cent.

Investment has been rising particularly strongly. Indeed, over the economy as a whole, I expect it to reach a new all-time high this year.

Employment has been rising at a brisk pace since early 1983, but not yet strongly enough to check the rise in the numbers of those registering as unemployed. The outlook for jobs will, however, have been helped by the recent fall in interest rates which largely reverses the increase during the summer. Provided we stick firmly to present policies, the prospect is of further interest rate cuts ahead.

This year's PSBR is likely to turn out higher than the £7·25 billion I envisaged at the time of the Budget, chiefly as a result of the coal strike. If the strike were to end at Christmas, it would add some £1·5 billion to borrowing this financial year; and the public expenditure planning total would be exceeded by about the same amount. On that basis, as I indicated to the House on 30 October, I estimate that the PSBR for 1984-85 will be some £8·5 billion, subject to the usual margin of uncertainty at this time of the year. A PSBR of this size would still be comfortably the smallest proportion of GDP for well over a decade.

For next year, with continued firm monetary and fiscal policies, inflation is expected to edge down slightly to 4½ per cent. by the fourth quarter. Output and employment will continue to rise, with total output expected to be up by a further 3½ per cent. in 1985, of which about 1 per cent. represents the assumed recovery from the coal strike. Within this total, the forecast suggests that 1985 will be another good year for exports and industrial investment. Indeed, investment by non-North sea businesses is expected to rise in real terms by 7 per cent. next year, following an 11 per cent. rise this year.

The House will wish to know what all this means so far as prospects for next year's Budget are concerned. The forecast makes the conventional assumptions that income tax and excise duties are both indexed in line with prices and that the PSBR is held next year to the £7 billion, or 2 per cent. of GDP, indicated in the medium-term financial strategy published at the time of the last Budget. It also takes into account the changes made in this year's Finance Act, which will take full effect next year and reduce taxation in 1985-86 by some £1¾ billion. Beyond that, the margin of uncertainty at this stage is very considerable, and the House will understand that the prospects for 1985-86 will need to be reviewed again, in the light of more up-to-date information, before I come to make my Budget judgment next year.

On this basis, I am glad to say that it does look as if there will be scope for some further net reductions in taxes in next year's Budget. I am sure that the whole House will welcome this prospect. The best figure that I can put on it at the present time is about £1½ billion.

The autumn statement is now available from the Vote Office and the House will no doubt wish to take it into account when we debate the economy tomorrow. It shows that for the third year running—that is, for every single year since the Government introduced cash planning for public expenditure—spending plans have been held at or below previous White Paper totals. It shows, too, that we are now in the fourth year of steady growth, with a further year of investment and export-led growth in prospect, and with no sign whatever of a resurgence of inflation. And the numbers in work are rising strongly for only the third time since the sixties.

The statement that I have published today sets the background against which further reductions in taxation should be possible, to help further stimulate the enterprise and dynamism of the British economy and thus produce more jobs for our people.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): May I first ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer a specific question about one item in his autumn expenditure review about which I suspect the House expected to hear and was disappointed not to hear? Is there, or is there not, to be a cut in the aid budget? Is the Chancellor aware that to cut overseas aid by any amount at this time would be to do more than demonstrate callous insensitivity? Cutting the aid programme while men and women are starving in Ethiopia would be to flaunt the Government's inhumanity.

May I, or rather may we—this is a matter of concern to the whole House—be given a categorical assurance that there is to be no cut in the aid budget and that the Chancellor has not, as many of us suspect he has, simply left the dirty work to the Foreign Office to leak or give out the news next month or the month after?

As always, the Chancellor counterfeited confidence in the eventual success of his policies. We were told exactly the same story last year.

Mr. Lawson: And it came to pass.

Mr. Hattersley: As the right hon. Gentleman shouts that his confidence has been justified, will he confirm that industrial output is lower than it was before last year's autumn statement and remains 8 per cent. lower than it was during the last year of the Labour Government? Will he also confirm that in September we simultaneously endured the worst balance of payments figures, the lowest value of sterling, the highest level of taxes and the highest unemployment in the history of this country?

[Mr. Hattersley]

Will the right hon. Gentleman describe the definition of success by which he justifies his assertion today? Let me tell him this: whining about the effects of the coal strike comes very ill from a Chancellor of the Exchequer who only four months ago described it as a good investment for Great Britain. Nor is the dispute the fundamental cause of the failures which I have just described. Why, despite the record of failure, does he still pretend that the economy can be rescued by manipulation of the PSBR and the money supply?

In today's statement the right hon. Gentleman has attempted, with rather less than complete success, to keep faith with the arbitrary targets for those two indices that he set himself. But while he has attempted to keep faith with those figures he has wholly betrayed the unemployed —both the 3·5 million men and women now out of work and the many more workers who will join the queue of the unemployed because of the additional deflation which the public expenditure programme now represents. Let the House and the country remember that the deflation would, of course, have been very much worse had the Chancellor not been deserted by the Prime Minister last Thursday in the Cabinet and had he been allowed to plunge us into an even greater slump than that which we face during the next 12 months.

Let me ask the right hon. Gentleman a question about unemployment, around which he skated with such an absence of dexterity. Has the right hon. Gentleman the courage to tell us now what the Government Actuary estimates as the increase in unemployment next year? The Government Actuary's figure is a statistic upon which much of the Government's planning is based. Will the right hon. Gentleman now tell us what that figure is? Is it true that the Actuary anticipates an increase in unemployment of about 400,000 men and women? If so, why did the Chancellor not have the courage to tell us so during his initial statement? Perhaps the real reason is that he knows, as we know, that responsibility for that increase lies in no small measure with him and the policies that he has outlined today.

In two specific areas the economy's deflation is both obvious and intentional. The Government are now pushing up energy prices, both through the imposition of corporation tax on the gas and electricity industries and through an increase in the surreptitious fuel tax as imposed through the external financing limits. Why has the Chancellor not told us today what those increases are to be—or must the Secretary of State for Energy make that announcement in payment for opposing the Chancellor's suggestion that they should be even higher and an even greater burden on industry than that which the Chancellor was able to impose on his reluctant colleagues?

May we be told the proposed increase in presciption and dental charges, or is the Chancellor ducking that one as well? Last year the right hon. Gentleman tried to bolster up his counterfeit enthusiam by giving us dubious figures. This year he has tried to maintain his position by giving us virtually no figures at all. That does nothing to encourage our confidence either in him or in the policies that he outlines. I think that the Chief Secretary will tell him the answer to my question almost immediately.

Has an estimate been made of the effect on the construction industry of the further cutback in public sector housing? We are told that the Secretary of State for the Environment believes that in some way he has resuscitated the housing programme. In fact, he has simply arranged for it it bleed to death more slowly than the Chancellor intended. In their first five years of office the Government halved the housing building programme, and this year both public and private housing building has further declined, yet the Chancellor proposed massive cuts, and has implemented substantial cuts.

How many more construction workers has the Chancellor condemned to unemployment by today's statement? Why do the Government assault the construction industry yet again, when everyone—even the CBI and, indeed, the *Daily Mail*—calls for more construction expenditure as a sure way of reviving the economy?

Will the Chancellor confirm that the whole object of his manipulation is to obtain £1½ billion, for distribution next year? Of course, part of that £1½ billion, if the Chancellor has his way, will be for cuts in direct taxation and will be financed by increases in indirect taxation. On the basis of previous records, indirect taxation will rise more than direct taxes fall.

That £1½ billion could be used in two ways. A reduction in direct taxation will create few jobs. If that £1½ billion were spent in the public sector, it would put about 250,000 men and women back to work. Why does the Chancellor, in every aspect of his policy, always choose the high unemployment option? I fear that the answer is that a permanent pool of 3 million unemployed is no longer simply the consequence of Tory policy but is an essential ingredient of it. That figure, that target, that objective and that intention is carefully planned and callously calculated. It represents a heartless disregard for millions of families, which the people will not tolerate.

Mr. Lawson: The right hon. Gentleman asked a large number of questions. Aid and the whole of the Overseas Development Administration is included in the budget for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, which is unchanged.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to last year's autumn statement and to my predictions then. He poured the same scorn on my predictions then as he did today, but those predictions were borne out entirely by events.

The balance of payments on current account is expected to be roughly in balance this year because of the substantially increased imports of oil as a result of the coal strike. We expect it to be in surplus by about £2½ billion next year. If a Labour Government had achieved anything like that, they would not have been able to believe their good fortune.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me about the unemployed. I have to tell him that the answer to unemployment is to create a more vigorous and enterprising economy. That is why it is essential to reduce the burden of taxation. The right hon. Gentleman also asked about the Government Actuary's assumptions. I stress that they are assumptions, not forecasts. The assumption is that unemployment in Great Britain, excluding school leavers, will average 3 million this year and 3 million next year—1985-86.

I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that there is no question of any sort of energy tax. Price increases are a matter for the industries concerned. I have no reason to believe that price increases will not be broadly in line with

the rate of inflation. Prescription charges are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

The right hon. Gentleman is mistaken in suggesting that substantial cuts in housing investment are to be made. He has confused the net expenditure line with the gross expenditure line. The net expenditure line has come down significantly as a result of a considerable increase in council house sales The success of that programme is one of the Government's most important achievements. The reduction in gross expenditure is very small indeed.

The reduction in taxation indicated, with a margin of uncertainty, for the next Budget is £1½ billion net, not gross. There will be a net decrease of about £1½ billion. There is no point in going into the right hon. Gentleman's phoney figures for job estimates and so on. It is not the Government who are banking on unemployment. It is the Opposition who are doing that and who are exploiting the plight of the unemployed for cheap party gain.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that, important though the statement is, there is an important debate to follow. What the Chancellor has said is debatable today, as it will be tomorrow. I propose to allow questions from Back Benchers to continue until 4.30 pm.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Conservative Members welcome his statement and congratulate him on keeping the public expenditure total this year within the target set last year? Does he agree that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) made cheap party points simply to get unanimity within his party? I suggest that my right hon. Friend ignores his strictures and stays on course.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that industry will welcome his statement about the national insurance fund, which will keep down labour costs? The sneering remarks of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook about a reduction in taxation will not help unemployment. It shows that the right hon. Gentleman does not understand how an economy works. If that money is left in the hands of the taxpayers, they will spend it in a better way than the Government will. We congratulate my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Lawson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. He is right to say that this Government's strategy is to maintain public expenditure at a constant level in real terms, which means that as the economy steadily grows there will be progressive scope for further reductions in taxation. That is the strategy and we are well on course. That is the way to create more employment.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Is the Chancellor aware that there will be certain scepticism about his figures because the Government Actuary's estimate of unemployment last year was grossly inaccurate? Is not the Actuary's assumption this year only 3 million, although we already have more than 3 million people out of work? Does the Chancellor accept that his statement will be judged by the action that he takes to reduce unemployment? Nothing that he has said today gives us any grounds for belief that what he is anticipating in public expenditure will do anything more than add considerably to unemployment. The cut in urban aid, the £600 million cut in local government capital account and the £65 million cut in the housing account will all work through to add to unemployment.

Did the right hon. Gentleman not say that he hopes to consider using £1½ billion for tax reductions? He gave no sign that he proposed to cut employer costs, which would provide an incentive for employers to engage more workers. Did he not give every sign that he intends to reduce direct taxation, as he has done in the past, to help those in jobs and on high incomes?

Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that the House expects him to use any money available to create more jobs, which means increasing capital spending — especially in the construction industry — and cutting employer costs through the restructuring of national insurance?

Mr. Lawson: The House will recognise that the spokesman for the Social Democratic party is not in favour of lower taxes. Of course this Government will do everything within their power to reduce the level of unemployment. However, it is an illusion to suppose that that can be achieved by an increase in public expenditure. Indeed, during the time of the Government of which he was a member the most rapid rise in unemployment occurred when public expenditure was rising fastest.

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): Is my right hon. Friend aware that much of what he has said will be welcome? However, the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee will need to examine his proposals in detail before a final judgment is made.

Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, as spending plans roll forward, it is usual for the Contingency Reserve to be less in the year ahead than it was originally, because uncertainty is less? Will additional payments be made to the EEC under the so-called inter-governmental agreement? In what way were those appraised in relation to competing claims for public expenditure?

Mr. Lawson: I thank my right hon. Friend for his remarks and also for the important part that he plays as Chairman of the Select Committee. I look forward to its report on the autumn statement, which will be helpful to the House in its debates.

My right hon. Friend's remarks about the Contingency Reserve are correct. The figures involved in the inter-governmental agreement have been fully taken into account in the statement that I have given to the House.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Is this not the fifth year in which the Government have said that the reduction of taxation will lead to a reduction of unemployment? Why has that not happened? Has the Chancellor taken account of what the CBI said when it called for the regeneration of British manufacturing industry and assistance for infrastructure projects? What will the right hon. Gentleman say to the CBI?

Mr. Lawson: Opposition Members fail to take into account the world climate, and they show a remarkably parochial view. Since the general election, when I took on the responsibility of Chancellor, unemployment in Britain has risen by 3·7 per cent., while in the remainder of the Community it has risen by 5·2 per cent. In Britain employment has risen by 1 per cent., while in the remainder of the Community there has been no rise in the number of people in work. In Britain gross domestic product has risen by 3 per cent., while in the remainder of the Community it has risen by 1½ per cent.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, despite his struggle to keep within his planning totals, nothing should now be allowed to stand in the way of the very substantial tax cuts that are required to create jobs — because they are the most powerful engine of job creation—to reduce the cost of hirings, to cope with the emerging and changing pattern of work in society and to encourage that pattern of work?

Mr. Lawson: My right hon. Friend has consistently advocated reductions in taxation, and he has been consistently right. It is a central plank of the Government's policy, which will bring about increasing employment opportunities for our people.

Mr. Richard Wainwright (Colne Valley): Is the Chancellor aware that the economy could not—to use his words—be driven off course because, apart from North sea oil, it is stuck fast in the ice of the Government's persistent deflation, to which he announced no end? Why, when the right hon. Gentleman is willing to devote time in his speech to trivia about the halfpenny, did he say nothing about capital expenditure to maintain the nation's public assets? What percentage of the planned expenditure for 1985-86 will be capital expenditure?

Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that his interpretation of the Industry Act forecast is intolerably complacent? He announced a puny figure for future economic growth that will do nothing seriously to prevent a further rise in unemployment. Is he not ashamed to contemplate the success of other industrial economies in the world compared with the modest forecast of growth that he provided this afternoon?

Mr. Lawson: I am astonished at the hon. Gentleman, because the Liberal party always turns its eyes to the European Community. As I reminded the House a few moments ago, our performance in both growth and other indicators has been significantly better than that of other members of the European Community.

It is too soon to give a precise breakdown of public expenditure plans between capital and current investment. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that this year we expect business investment — and that is non-North sea business investment—to increase by 11 per cent. in real terms, followed by a 7 per cent. increase in real terms next year. The level of investment in the economy has never been higher than it is this year.

Mr. Reg Prentice (Daventry): Is it the Government's intention that the overseas aid programme for next year will keep pace with inflation and represent the same real value as the programme this year? Does my right hon. Friend recognise that anything less than that will not be tolerable in the view of millions of people of all political persuasions, who were shocked by recent events?

Mr. Lawson: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments. I know that there is a great deal of concern on both sides of the House over this issue. Total provision for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the ODA, remains as in this year's White Paper and is up 4½ per cent. in cash terms over the previous year, which is roughly in line with inflation. The breakdown of the total budget of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. The House will be aware that overseas aid accounts for well over half the total budget of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): We understand the Chancellor's continuing failure to deliver his much-mentioned cuts in the rate of taxation, but why does he have to make further self-defeating cuts in public expenditure and further increases in indirect and hidden taxation to make room for the cuts? What has he done with the £11,000 million which he now receives every year from the North sea revenue, which his predecessors never even remotely enjoyed?

Mr. Lawson: There is no question of a failure to cut direct taxation. If income tax had remained at the levels which we inherited from the Labour Government, and even if, which is highly unlikely, all the thresholds had been fully revalorised every year, the burden of income tax would still be £4 billion more than it is now.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): If my right hon. Friend's forecast of growth in output and the movement in prices is borne out, will we not have had steady growth in output for four or five years, accompanied by static or falling inflation? Would that not be something of a record for Britain in recent decades?

Mr. Lawson: My right hon. Friend is correct. That is something that has not occurred since the war. Sustained growth with no resurgence of inflation is something which Britain has long sought, including by my predecessors, and now it is coming about for the first time.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): Despite two attempts to answer questions on the aid programme, will the Chancellor of the Exchequer now give a straight yes or no in answer to my question? Is the aid programme to be cut, or is it not? What savings does he expect to make as a result of the revamping of the regional policy? Those in high unemployment areas are deeply concerned about that.

Mr. Lawson: As I have made clear, total provision for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is unchanged from the White Paper figures. The precise amount that is devoted to aid within that programme is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. The revamped regional policy will be made known to the House towards the end of the month. One of its features —this was made clear in the White Paper—is that it will be more job-related than the old policy.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the preposterous claims of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and the public expenditure increases which he proposes offer no solution to long-term unemployment and were effectively refuted by a previous Labour Prime Minister, who presided over a Government of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member, when he said that it is not possible to spend one's way out of a recession? Is my right hon. Friend aware that his package would be much more acceptable to Conservative Members if he spelt out clearly that the £1·5 billion in tax reductions that he proposes will be in direct taxes and will be designed to encourage industry and enterprise in the spread of ownership of all sorts throughout the community?

Mr. Lawson: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks, of which I shall take full account when I come to frame the Budget.

Mr. Norman Atkinson (Tottenham): What sort of decadent morality is it for the Chancellor to reiterate his

commitment to reduce taxation when he knows that the poor are getting poorer and the rich richer? He knows that unemployment will remain the same in 1985 and 1986 and probably into 1987. How does he square his recent statements about reducing unemployment with the distribution of the £1·5 billion which he has announced, 85 per cent. of which will go to those with above average earnings?

Mr. Lawson: The hon. Gentleman claims to be able to forecast precisely what will happen to unemployment. I do not make that claim. The living standard of an average family with an average income has risen steadily during the Government's period in office and is now at the highest level ever.

Mr. Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): May I repeat to my right hon. Friend the basic question which I have been putting to him and his predecessor ever since it became clear in the winter of 1978-79 that the world was moving into serious recession? Does he agree that one of the main objects of British economic policy should be to increase our national wealth over and above the fortuitous and inevitably temporary bonus of North sea oil? If he does agree with that, how does he account for the fact that the two most succcessful economies in the world, Japan and the United States, have consistently run public sector borrowing requirements very much greater than our own, with the result that they have much higher levels of employment and lower rates of inflation? Is it not now time for the Government to launch a real campaign to bring down unemployment?

Mr. Lawson: I share my hon. Friend's concern about unemployment. Given the views which he has expressed elegantly over a number of years, I am sorry that he gives no credit to the Government for their success in reducing inflation. He need not worry too much about North sea oil being a temporary phenomenon, for it will certainly see out his active life. It is patently wrong to suggest that the United States has consistently run a higher public sector borrowing requirement than our own. Over the years it has consistently run a lower borrowing requirement than we have. It is only recently that its borrowing requirement has exceeded ours.

My hon. Friend is right to point to Japan and the United States as being the most successful economies in the Western world. It is striking to note that they are the economies which have the lowest proportion of public expenditure to gross domestic product, and the lowest proportion of taxation to GDP.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman come out from behind the Foreign Secretary on the aid issue? Is it not a fact that, even if total funds increase by 4½ per cent. to cover domestic inflation, a significant proportion of the expenditure of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is on sustaining services abroad? If the value of sterling and the rate of inflation differ, those services will have to be sustained. Is it not a fact that the amount available for aid could be reduced? Surely it is the Chancellor's responsibility to see that it is retained at no less a level than that for the current year.

Mr. Lawson: Implicit in the hon. Gentleman's question, as we are talking about 1985-86, there seems to be the view that the dollar is likely to continue to rise in 1985-86. I do not know what will happen to the dollar, but most observers regard it as more likely that the dollar will fall.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): As my right hon. Friend has said, it is not his responsibility to fix the level of prices in the nationalised industries, particularly the price of electricity. However, can he nevertheless give an assurance that, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he will not increase the rate of return on capital, which in turn would force the industry to put up electricity prices, which could be serious for the steel and chemical industries?

Mr. Lawson: I am aware of the sensitivity of electricity prices for the chemical and steel industries. It is necessary for the electricity industry to earn a rather better rate of return than it has been earning hitherto, but, nevertheless, I see no reason why that should require price increases in excess of inflation.

Mr. James Callaghan (Cardiff, South and Penarth): As this is the first time within my recollection that the Government have failed to give a separate figure for overseas aid, is the Chancellor aware that unless he does so he will be regarded as concealing something? Why can he not tell us now what the figure is and why the Government are leaving it undetermined in this way?

Mr. Lawson: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that I should not dream of concealing anything from him. The plain fact of the matter is that the global figure that was agreed for the total expenditure of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the ODA programme, and the division of that into the various component parts, is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Ian Lloyd (Havant): My right hon. Friend will doubtless have made his comments on the dismal relationship between the many efforts made to save a few hundred million here and there over the whole range of public expenditure—I refer particularly to fundamental British science—and the addition of £1·5 billion to the coal cost, bringing it to a total of £2·8 billion, to finance Mr. Scargill's takeover bid? Is it not essential that the country should realise the result of these figures? The country does not understand what a billion means, but it is about £56 per head, or £140 per family.

Mr. Lawson: My right hon. Friend is right to draw attention to those substantial figures, and I am sure that the House will welcome the continuing increase in the number of miners returning to work.

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): What is the precise reduction in the urban programme, and what hope is there for local authorities in inner cities and in old industry communities as a result of the reduction in real terms of 3 per cent. in local government spending?

Mr. Lawson: The urban programme will still be running at a substantial level, despite the reductions that have been set out.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend give the House further details of the reduction in domestic support for agriculture? Is he aware that there will be widespread support throughout the House for these reductions, as there is little argument in favour of having a second stimulus in addition to high EEC

[Mr. Nicholas Budgen]

prices at a time when agricultural policy is creating little extra employment and changing for the worse the face of the British countryside?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend never lacks originality. The biggest contribution to such reductions is a decrease in capital grants, and I believe that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is putting out a press release, or perhaps has already done so, setting the matter out in more detail.

I have just been reminded, and I am sure that the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) would like to know, that this is not the first occasion on which a combined figure has been given for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the ODA.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Why has the Chancellor one again rejected the argument put forward by his right hon. and hon. Friends from the wet end of the Conservative party that an increase in public expenditure and capital infrastructure projects will do far more for employment than a reduction in direct tax for many of his rich friends? What happened to the Prime Minister's promise that the pound note was sacrosanct?

Mr. Lawson: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made no such statement and never used the word "sacrosanct" or anything like it. As for unemployment, the House has already been reminded that the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth, who is a former Prime Minister, made it clear to a Labour party conference that there was no way that one could spend oneself into higher activity. The only way to create more jobs is by having a more competitive and enterprising economy. That is what we are on the way to achieving, and tax cuts are an essential ingredient in that.

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): My right hon. Friend said that the budget of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was to be held at the present level for 1985-86. Does this not mean, even on the United Kingdom inflation figure, a reduction of 5 per cent. in real terms? Furthermore, if we add to that the impact of much higher inflation rates abroad and the continuing weakness of the pound against the dollar, does this not represent a further reduction in the real value of the foreign and overseas budget? Where is the money coming from? Is it coming from the closing of embassies, the dismissal of staff, the reduction of the British Council, reductions in the BBC overseas service, or from the overseas aid programme?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend has misread the columns of figures in the autumn statement. The provision for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for this year, 1984-85, is £1,800 million. Under the revised plans for 1985-86, the provision is £1,870 million, an increase of £70 million, or approximately 4½ per cent. As for the foreign currency element, it is difficult to say what will happen to foreign currencies in the future. I have no reason to believe that sterling will fall in relation to the dollar over the year to 18 months ahead.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): The Chancellor thinks that unemployment will be reduced by further cuts in taxation. How is it that under his stewardship tax cuts of £4,500 million have taken place, £2 billion of which have gone to the top 1 per cent. of the population earning more than £20,000 a year and only £135 million of which has gone to the bottom quarter of the population, but unemployment has now reached real levels of 5 million? What further tax cuts can reduce unemployment?

Mr. Lawson: The overwhelming proportion of the reductions in income tax that there have been have gone to people with below average or slightly above average incomes and not to the rich. As to the total burden of taxation, during the first Parliament of this Government we were not able to reduce taxation overall because we had inherited a substantial, grossly excessive budget deficit or borrowing requirement, which had to be brought down. All our efforts had to be directed towards that. Now that we have achieved that during our first term, we are in our second term of office and can really get down to the business of reducing taxation.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the feebleness of the Opposition's attack shows that he has made an autumn statement of impregnable virtue and prudence? In particular, will my right hon. Friend accept congratulations on increasing the enterprise allowance, which has done much to stimulate jobs, and is he aware of the welcome that we have given to his decision to cut back the widespread abuses in the DHSS allowances for board and lodgings?

Mr. Lawson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. I know that he will be especially interested in the details of the improvements to the enterprise allowance scheme and other employment and training schemes, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment will be able to announce shortly.

Mr. Hattersley: As the Chancellor has argued all afternoon that his statement represents a sovereign cure for the economy next year, why was he arguing for quite different packages as late as Thursday last week?

Mr. Lawson: There is no truth whatsoever in either part of the right hon. Gentleman's assertion.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning the outrageous Opposition slur that unemployment is in some way an instrument, or possibly even an objective, of the Government? Does he agree that two of the most important factors in reducing unemployment are lowering the rate of inflation and maintaining a steady rate of economic expansion?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is right. The Opposition tried to blame the increase in unemployment on the Government at the time of the general election. The people did not believe them then, and they do not believe them now.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the Customs Duties (ECSC) (Amendment No. 5) Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Customs Duties (ECSC) (Amendment No. 6) Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Consular Relations (Privileges and Immunities) (People's Republic of China) Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Crown Agents Commencing Capital Debt Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Points of Order

4.30 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have noticed that during questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer the Leader of the SDP, the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), asked a question early on as a result of you giving him the opportunity to do so. He seemed to get in very early. Some hon. Members on both sides of the House could not ask a question, and I should have thought that it was taking things a little too far even for this pompous sod down here——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must ask the hon. Gentleman immediately to withdraw that word, which I will not mention again.

Mr. Skinner: I withdraw the word "pompous".

Mr. Speaker: It is not that word but the other one that I want the hon. Member to withdraw. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that moderation of language in our proceedings is all-important if we are to have civilised debate. He is an experienced Member of the House. I appeal to him at the beginning of this Session—will he please now withdraw that remark?

Mr. Skinner: No.

Mr. Speaker: I order the hon. Member to withdraw from the Chamber for the rest of this day's sitting.

The hon. Member, having used a grossly disorderly expression, was ordered by Mr. SPEAKER *to withdraw the same, but he declined to comply with that direction; whereupon* Mr. SPEAKER, *pursuant to Standing Order No. 24 (Disorderly conduct), ordered him to withdraw immediately from the House during the remainder of this day's sitting; and he withdrew accordingly.*

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): May I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker? You are right to say that there are still two days for the debate on the Loyal Address and that there may yet be opportunities to pursue other matters. An important matter that has not yet been discussed is prescription charges. Have you received a request from the Secretary of State for Social Services to make a statement to the House, which the House can then debate, on increased Health Service charges?

Mr. Speaker: I have not received such a request, although it may come. I repeat to the hon. Gentleman and to the House that I allowed a full hour for questions on the Chancellor's statement, which I realise is extremely important, but there are two further days of debate on the Loyal Address. I am certain that the matter will arise again at Question Time and in subsequent debates.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, further to that raised by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). Would it not assist the hon. Member to overcome his problems if you would ensure that hon. Members did not wish to leave the Chamber because of so many boring interventions by Labour Members, and because of two interventions from Labour Front Bench spokesmen, one of which amounted to a speech longer than the one made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already dealt with the hon. Member for Bolsover.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Back Bench Members much appreciate your considerable role in ensuring that we are heard, but today many people were disappointed because the Leader of the SDP abused the House, after you had said that you were giving time to Back Bench Members, by catching your eye and thereby excluding many hon. Members who wished to make a point.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) is a Back Bench Member.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt), can you, Mr. Speaker, tell us when we are likely to be told about the increase in NHS charges, which is causing fear and concern to users and workers in the service even today?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[FIFTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [6 November],

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament—*[Sir Paul Bryan.]*

Question again proposed.

Industry and Employment

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition and his right hon. and hon. Friends.

I have received many applications from hon. Members who wish to speak in the debate on the Loyal Address. This is the fifth day. It is not a day on which I can apply the 10-minute limit recently agreed by the House, because the debate on the Loyal Address does not fall within the categories of debate to which the new procedures apply. Therefore, I appeal to hon. Members to exercise restraint wherever possible and to confine their contributions, if they can, to 10 minutes. I have received more than 40 applications to speak today, and although a time limit does not apply to the Front-Bench spokesmen, I hope that they will take note of what I have said.

4.37 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I beg to move, at the end of the Question, to add:

But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech proposes to continue policies which imperil Britain's industry and relentlessly increase unemployment and fails to propose any effective measures to rebuild the nation's industrial base and create new opportunities for employment.

Before we embark on what will inevitably be a deeply controversial debate, may I express what I am sure is the unanimous regret of the House that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry cannot be in his customary place to take part. There are few members of the Government with whom the Opposition disagree more sharply, and, as we know, those disagreements are often directly expressed on both sides. However, we have nothing but the deepest respect and admiration for the courage and fortitude which he and his wife have shown in the aftermath of the terrible events at Brighton. To them both we send our greetings, and we hope and pray that their recoveries will be soon and complete.

The amendment to the Loyal Address is sharp and to the point. The Gracious Speech, and the Chancellor's statement earlier today, show little appreciation of the deep crisis that affects a country with 4 million unemployed. They show no recognition of the perils that face a country part of whose industrial structure has already collapsed, and much of which faces the dangers of the future in a weakened and debilitated state. It is a

triumph of euphemism over reality to say, as Government apologists regularly do, that our industry is leaner and fitter. In truth, it is smaller and weaker.

More than five years ago, the Government, after abusing the policies of their predecessors—even those of different political hues—changed economic course. We were told that new, bold policies were to be the basis of a new economic success that would secure full employment and an expanding economy. What has happened? Not only has unemployment soared to unprecedented levels, and is still rising, but, as the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) said only today in *The Guardian*, manufacturing production is 12·5 per cent. below its peak level in 1979 when the Labour Government left office and manufacturing investment, which is the key to our future prosperity in that area, is 30 per cent. below the level in 1979.

Therefore, we have suffered, are suffering and look like continuing to suffer in an even more aggravated form the miseries of mass unemployment, with all that that means in terms of personal hardship, disappointment, frustration, bitterness, family distress and social division.

How can this be the country in which, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer smugly claimed in his Mansion House speech, the economy is in good shape? The truth is that five years ago we did not embark upon the high road to prosperity, but were led into a monetarist cul-de-sac. This great country has been made the laboratory for the monetarist experiment. Not only has the experiment failed, as all except the purblind on the Conservative Front Bench can now see, but the Government do not know what to do next. When they are confronted with their failures, like the generals of the first world war, they reinforce their mistakes. We saw a classic example of that today in the statement by the Chancellor.

Therefore, the first charge that we make against the policies in the Gracious Speech is that they are the same policies as those that brought us to our present sorry state, and must be changed. But I regret to say that there was not a hint in the Gracious Speech or today's statement that anyone in the Government realises that necessity. That statement was again bad news for the unemployed and for our industry.

The Government sometimes claim that all would have been well with the experiment but for the international recession. "It is not our fault", they say, "but the necessary consequence of international events beyond our control." Indeed, the Chancellor of the Exchequer hinted as much this afternoon. Of course there has been an international recession that has aggravated the problems that any Government would have been bound to face, but it is also a fact that the Government have advocated internationally the same deflationary policies as they have practised at home. There is a peculiar irony in seeking an excuse in external events. The charge that we make is that their policies, instead of countering the effects of the international recession, have aggravated it and made its impact deeper and more serious for our citizens.

Let us not forget that this country faced the international recession with an enormous advantage denied to all our western neighbours except Norway — the windfall of North sea oil. From 1979 until the end of this year the Government will have received over £40 billion in North sea oil revenues and they are presently receiving £11 billion each year as North sea oil production is forced up to record levels to finance Britain's rising unemployment. None of our principal international competitors had an advantage like that. It is not just an advantage in terms of revenue that the Chancellor does not have to raise otherwise, but an enormous advantage in terms of the balance of payments and the balance of trade where at present it hides some ugly truths about our non-oil trading position.

What have the Government done with that windfall of North sea oil? They have spent it all—every penny piece of it—in paying for the extra unemployment that they have caused since 1979. That statistic can be easily computed. The House of Lords Select Committee on Unemployment calculated that it costs the state at least £5,000 a year for every person who becomes unemployed in terms of unemployment or social security benefit, lost insurance contributions, lost taxes and lost value added tax. That is a widely accepted figure. On any calculation, there are an extra 2 million unemployed, even taking the Government's fiddled figures. The sum of £5,000 multiplied by 2 million is £10 billion, which is roughly the same as the North sea oil revenues that we are receiving. So as the money comes in one door from the North sea out it goes through another door to pay for the extra unemployment that the Government have created.

What will historians make of that when they ask what Britain did with its North sea oil revenues? They will hardly believe that the Government spent it all on the unemployment over which they presided. Back in 1978-79 when the argument started about what we would do with our revenues, I thought—I was Minister responsible for oil at the time — that there would be an interesting debate between the Left and the Right. The Left would argue for the Government spending the money on regional programmes, support for industry, education, training and a whole host of things. I thought that the Right would argue that the money should be given away in tax cuts, as the Right would put it, and used in a series of individual rather than community choices. However, I never thought then that we would devise a new and devious plan—that we would do neither, but save it all up so that we could spend it all on unemployment. I shudder to think what a historian will make of those events when the truth is ultimately revealed.

Therefore, the Government had the advantages that none of their predecessors had. The previous Labour Government, who did so much to secure that North sea oil came on stream by 1980, received £800 million compared with the £40 billion that has come to their successors. Therefore, the Government's predecessors did not have those advantages, although they did better in managing the economy than the Government have since 1979. None of our competitors have had those advantages, yet we have weathered the recession worse than any of them.

Politically, the recession is used as an excuse. The Government say that unemployment is not the result of their policies or mismanagement but a fact of life. It is like the plagues of the middle ages, something one cannot do much about. One can hardly ameliorate it, and one must suffer and endure it. I think that the public are beginning to become suspicious about that.

There has been a more subtle political ploy in recent years. The Prime Minister has been a specialist in the art of appealing for short-term sacrifice for long-term gain. She struck a chord in that peculiar combination of stoicism and masochism that is deep in the British character. When the Prime Minister said that we must suffer unemployment

[Mr. John Smith]

now because that is necessary to get real jobs in future, the people gave her the benefit of the doubt. When cuts were made in necessary services and children left school to go on the dole, the people wondered but kept saying, "Maybe it is necessary after all." How many of us have heard the phrase, "But maybe it is for the best"? Such phrases come from the lips of people who suffer more from those policies than from many others.

The Prime Minister has cynically benefited from that popular sentiment and its ruthless exploitation by her Government. But I warn her and her Government that the risk that was inherent all along in that political strategy is now coming home to roost. When the people realise that their sacrifice was not for the best, that short-term suffering leads not to long-term benefit but to greater long-term suffering, that the lost jobs were the precursors not of real jobs in the future but of rising unemployment and that the cut in services is not temporary but may be permanent, their anger, which is slowly rising, will be directed with particular force against the Prime Minister and a Government who deceived their better nature so thoroughly and comprehensively.

The truth is that after five years of unemployment reaching record levels, the prognosis is that it will go on rising relentlessly and remorselessly. It will no longer do for Ministers to say, as they do, that they really care. In debate after debate they have told the House that they do not mind criticism but that they object to the accusation that they have a lack of concern for the unemployed. No doubt we shall hear this from the Secretary of State for Employment. How often have we heard Ministers say that Opposition Members should not claim that they have a monopoly of concern for the unemployed? We have given them the benefit of the doubt until now, but after the Gracious Speech and today's statement by the Chancellor the Government have a simple choice about whether to change their policies. If they do, that will show that they care, but if they refuse to do so we shall allege continuously that they do not and cannot possibly care about the consequences of their policies.

Unemployment is not, as the Chancellor sought to make out in a recent interview with "Weekend World", simply some kind of social phenomenon. It is the result of economic policy. The House has the choice of following policies which reduce taxes but do not create jobs or policies of public expenditure which create jobs. That argument has already been rehearsed to some extent in exchanges earlier today. I hope that we shall have a direct answer from the Government today as to why they do not embark on even a modest capital expenditure programme in both public works and industry, which the entire spectrum of opinion in this country not only recommends but urges on them. That is the very minimum that the Government can do, and it is the minimum that we expect of them.

The Government do not just blame their miseries on external events. A most unpleasant feature of their political technique is to blame those miseries on other people in this country. I have never known a Government more dedicated to the scapegoat theory of politics. At the beginning, they blamed the Labour Government for all our miseries. Then it was American interest rates. It is sometimes the international recession. It is always the trade unions. But it is never the Government. The latest nonsense is that unemployment exists because trade unions will not accept wage cuts. As the Chancellor and others in the Government well know, wages in Britain are low compared with the rest of Europe. Indeed, we have a serious problem not just of unemployment but of low pay. In the past five years, real wages have risen by only 5 per cent. whereas relative production costs, which can erode our competitive position, have risen by more than 50 per cent. Before turning on the trade unions yet again, let the Chancellor consider the effect on jobs of high interest rates, the years of the grossly overvalued pound, the savage cuts in public spending and the lost spending power of the millions on the dole. Those are the real causes of unemployment, not some scapegoat to be found in the trade unions.

A new scapegoat theory is being fashioned at this very moment. It will be to blame our woes on the miners' strike. Before that theory gets fully under way, let it be remembered that the Chancellor himself told a stunned House of Commons that the strike was a substantial national investment. Moreover, throughout the entire eight months of the dispute no Minister has ever urged talks, pushed for a settlement or sought to mediate. The Government are quick to condemn and not a day goes by without their attempting to sharpen conflict. Do they not realise that British Governments have a responsibility to help settle and not to inflame industrial disputes? Even now a new phase could be started if the Secretary of State for Energy, the Secretary of State for Employment or indeed any Minister would invite the parties to seek settlement at talks inaugurated by the Government. The longer the dispute goes on, the greater will be the cost to us all. Already more money has been lost than all the so-called savings that the Government claim would result over the next 10 years if the pits earmarked for closure were closed. If the £2·5 billion spent in the course of the dispute had been invested in the industry the future of the industry could have been secured for decades to come. Therefore, we appeal once again to the Government to stop trying to break the strike and to start trying to settle it.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Forgetting the miners, as I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would prefer, but before leaving the subject of trade unions and pay increases, will he apply his mind to the following question? British Leyland is still losing money, but workers there are on strike for a 22 per cent. increase, whereas those at General Motors in America have accepted 5 per cent. phased over three years, and that company is making a profit. Which company does he believe will prosper and who will cost jobs—the selfish union, the poor unemployed or the Government?

Mr. Smith: As the hon. Gentleman should know, the major difference between BL and General Motors is the far greater demand for the product in the United States due to policies which created demand and thus allowed companies to be successful. If the hon. Gentleman lectures the trade unions, I hope that he will urge others associated with some of his economic endeavours to make the same sacrifices as he recommends to the unions. Directors in British industry have had substantial increases in the past year. If they were prepared to accept the same restraints his advice might be more credible.

I shall no doubt be accused of being unfair to the Government and unduly pessimistic. We shall be told that things are on the mend and will soon be better. The notion that somehow things are about to get better has been put to us every year for the past four or five years. In 1981 the present Chancellor said:

"We expect output to be on a rising trend during 1981-82".

On 25 June of that year the Prime Minister herself said:

"There are now clear signs that the worst of the recession is over".

In November 1981 she said:

"We are reaching the trough of the recession and it will start to turn up towards the end of next year".

In January 1982, the present Home Secretary, then a Treasury Minister, said:

"We said in late 1980 that we were going to reach the low point of the recession in the spring last year: we did. We said in last year's Budget that we would then embark on a path of steady recovery: we have."

In March 1982, the Prime Minister claimed:

"We are beginning to see the success that we knew our policies would produce . . . After nearly three years of battling, we are beginning to see the regeneration of our economy."

Worst of all, in his famous statement on 17 May 1982 the present Home Secretary stated:

"The evidence of recovery is all about us. Not even the most blinkered pessimist could fail to see it."

After all that, the Government having been proved wrong in 1980, 1981 and 1982, why should anyone believe them in 1983? Even then, however, some trusting people listened to the Chancellor's claim in his speech to the Leicestershire Young Farmers Club on 2 December 1983, when he said:

"I was lambasted for my 'optimism'. The bringer of good news is scarcely better treated than the bringer of bad.

But the critics must be beginning to worry.

For this week's seasonally adjusted figures were the third in the last four months to show a fall in adult unemployment. This is news which all should welcome . . .

In short, it looks as though unemployment is now levelling off . . .

The strategy is on course. We shall stick with it."

The price of our sticking with that policy has been 140,000 more unemployed since the Chancellor uttered those words.

The penny then began to drop, however, and there was a noticeable change between that speech and the Chancellor's words to the IMF on 25 September this year when at last it was gouged from a Minister that

"The one outstanding worry is unemployment, which is not only far too high but continues to rise."

Some of us were greatly encouraged by the thought that the truth had finally penetrated, but the Chancellor then went on to describe his vision of the future in which Britain was turned into a trading post for other people's products — a series of Kentucky fried chicken franchises stretching from one end of the country to the other in which, he says, the future for our young people will not be in the jobs of the past and that those of the future will be

"not so much low-tech as no-tech."

That is the Chancellor's vision for this country — not even low-tech but no-tech.

That is where we are now. There has been some recognition by the Government of the immensity of the problem, but they have not the faintest idea what to do about it. That is clear from the Queen's Speech. The Government are off on more diversions, more privatisation. What on earth has that to do with Britain's industrial recovery? It is utterly irrelevant to our economic circumstances and it will be used more and more as an exercise in selling off the furniture to make the books balance. There are platitudes about competition and about freeing the labour market. That has little to do with the lack of demand in the economy. To free the labour market probably means to abolish wages councils and to remove protection. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad to note that that torpedo struck its target. It is not in the Gracious Speech, but Conservative Members will press for it to be included. The Government's prescription for curing our economy is to depress the wages and conditions of our poorest people. Worst of all, we await the ominous announcement about regional development policy. We fear that the Government will cut £10 billion from regional assistance during the next five years.

The Government do not know where they are going. Therefore we must urgently start a new debate about our industrial future and what will happen when our oil runs out. My fear, which is proclaimed by my right hon. and hon. Friends and which is even more widely shared, is that we shall face the non-oil 1990s with two problems in industry: outdated technology and a relatively unskilled work force. The time is now ripe for us to start a debate about Britain's new industrial policy.

The debate should be based on six pillars. The first is a new attitude to investment. The Government should be responsible for ensuring long-term investment on favourable terms for the key industries on which Britain will depend in the future. Secondly, we need a massive research and development programme related to the development of new products for the markets of the future so that we can lead, not trail, our competitors in new technology. Thirdly, we must launch the most expansive training and retraining programme in our history, instead of tinkering about with the youth training scheme. There must be a minimum of two year's education and training for all school leavers. That must be followed by extensive training and retraining throughout their working lives.

Fourthly, we must reshape the relationship between Government and industry so that the Government reinforce the efforts of industry to make new products, capture new markets and manage trade more effectively. Under the Government we have reached the appalling position in which we have a deficit in manufacturing trade for the first time in our industrial history. Recently I read a prediction that in the reasonably near future we may have a deficit of £1 billion in information technology products. That prediction was made by a bank, which is not known to favour my propositions specially.

Fifthly, we need a new approach to regional policy. We need to breathe new life into the proper distribution of industry and resources and to bring an end to the deadly divide between the prosperous south and the poverty-stricken north. Sixthly, we need to build a new partnership within industry. We must stop the constant sniping at the representative institutions of working people. We must start to build a new consensus within industry to achieve agreed targets, which are necessary for our industrial recovery.

I fear that that will not happen quickly. The Government have wasted our assets and squandered our opportunities. Nevertheless, it is not too late to begin the task of rebuilding our industry and economy. The Labour party in the House and especially next year when we launch our jobs and industry campaign will continually and relentlessly call the attention of the nation to that end.

5.4 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Tom King): I welcome the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) to his new position. I also commiserate with him—I do not know why he was moved. I thought that he was doing quite a good job. But setbacks happen to all of us at one time or another, and he will no doubt have another chance later. More seriously, I welcome him, in the absence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, to his new position. I thank him on behalf of all Conservative Members for the gracious way in which he referred to my right hon. Friend. That was greatly appreciated. We echo the hope of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) that my right hon. Friend will be restored to rude health soon.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman was right to refer to industrial disputes, strikes, and the problems in the coal mining industry, and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) to refer to disputes in the motor industry. It would have been encouraging for the House if the right hon. and learned Gentleman had shown a greater measure of leadership over how this damaging dispute could be settled. The Labour party is led by a right hon. Gentleman whose major contribution so far has been to say, "My diary is too full for me to make any specific comment on the matter". The part of the press report I enjoyed most was where it said that the position of the Leader of the Opposition was fully supported by the Shadow Cabinet. What on earth is that supposed to mean? Was the diary solemnly passed from hand to hand in the Shadow Cabinet so that they could all certify that it was a true and accurate record of the right hon. Gentleman's movements? Did he say, "Come on John, come on Roy, come on Denis, you can see that I am busy. I cannot be expected to go to those rallies"?

The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned the Chancellor of the Exchequer in a reference to the first world war. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Clark), who is one of the greatest authorities on the first world war, pointed out that that was a frequent allusion. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned Gallipoli in connection with the president of the National Union of Mineworkers. I refer specifically to the phrase about his being the closest equivalent in the Labour movement to a first world war general. That obsession with the first world war will strike some chords with us.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware that in some ways the debate is a repeat of the debate we had about 10 days ago. He will recall some similarities. The Leicester Young Farmers' Club must be the best advertised in the business. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned it then, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) rehearsed it then and, indeed, I am mentioning it now. Therefore it is certainly getting full coverage.

I preferred some aspects of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech today to those speeches. He set out a programme which he sought for his party in this matter. His main contribution appeared to be to change the investment programme from £6 billion to £2·3 billion for infrastructure, even though he could not say what that would mean for jobs.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman was speaking well until he was asked about the state of the car industry. He said that it was all a question of demand. In an economic sense that was an illiterate response. It is not a question of demand. Demand is extremely encouraging. The problem is the capacity of British industry to compete with overseas suppliers and to win back demand. It would be better if, instead of 50 per cent. of demand in the car industry being met by overseas suppliers, we could move back to those heady days when overseas penetration was not more than about 10 or 12 per cent. That would be a happy improvement.

I shall leave the main burden of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's attack concerning the perils of the British economy to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, who hopes to wind up. The House would expect me to deal with relevant measures that are foreshadowed in the autumn statement. In case there is any misunderstanding, I should make it clear that there is no question but that the prospect for more employment is based on a strong and expanding economy. Control of public expenditure, the confidence that grows from that, reductions in interest rates and in mortgage rates and the investment intentions of companies are the source of jobs.

The Government have long recognised that there are some specific ways in which to help the economy function better. We must ensure that we have the necessary skills to be able to respond quickly to changes in the labour market's demands and to help the unemployed have a better chance of work. Since 1979, we have developed a range of measures to improve training provision and to help the unemployed back to work. Now, 700,000 people are being helped under the various schemes on which expenditure has now risen fourfold since 1979 to well over £2 billion in the current financial year. The third part of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's programme insisted on two years' training. I recall that he was a member of the Labour Cabinet which refused to back Shirley Williams' desire to launch a modest equivalent of the successful youth training scheme that we have set in motion. His criticism in that respect is ill-received.

Developments in the training programmes represent a considerable achievement. The Manpower Services Commission has achieved much. It is appropriate for me to welcome, I hope on behalf of the whole House, the MSC's new chairman—Mr. Bryan Nicholson. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about Lord Young?"] Of course, I pay tribute to his work as chairman of the MSC. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Employment, who has worked closely with him, welcomes his efforts. In case the right hon. and learned Gentleman suspects that there is some terrifying plot, perhaps I should say that I welcome the help and support of anyone who is prepared to work on the most difficult problem that faces any Government in the modern Western world—full employment.

I should like to announce further developments of the schemes for the coming year. Some will involve additional expenditure but there is one area in which I shall achieve some savings. It concerns the redundancy payments rebate. I intend to introduce an order that will reduce from 41 per cent. to 35 per cent. the proportion that the Government pay towards the statutory redundancy payment. That does not affect the amount that a redundant employee receives; it merely affects the balance between

the relative contributions of Government and employer. It is not unreasonable to make this change now, the more so as we have maintained the higher level throughout the time of heavy redundancies. The cost for industry will be small, especially when set against the substantial benefits that will accrue in the coming year from the abolition of the national insurance surcharge. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, the full benefit of that is only just starting to be felt in industry. Further details of my proposal will be available in a press notice in the Library.

I shall now consider the areas of increased expenditure on training. It is clear that our more successful competitors such as Germany, the United States and Japan invest more in training than do we. In those countries the greater commitment to training comes not so much from Government as from employers, who devote more resources to training than do their British counterparts. In those countries, people expect and are expected to play a greater part in investment in their training. I am not trying to deny the Government's important role in the nation's training effort. We intend to continue to play a full part and to increase it. Our first priority has been the need to ensure that general vocational education and training should be readily available to help the transition from school to work and to cope with the changing needs of employment.

Our youth training scheme has made an excellent start. We guaranteed that every unemployed 16-year-old school leaver who wanted it would be offered a year of proper training and work experience. In the scheme's first year we secured that objective and met it for 17-year-olds as well. A small but vocal and unrepresentative minority, unfortunately including some Labour Members, set out from the start to belittle the scheme. They said that there would not be sufficient places to meet the guarantee. We have met that guarantee in full, with places to spare. They said that young people would not want to join the scheme. Last year, 350,000 youngsters proved them wrong. As compared with last year, still more young people have come forward to take part in the scheme. Perhaps most damaging of all, it was said that the scheme was a dead end and that there was no prospect of jobs at the end. Early results show that that was also incorrect. Our first results are only for Easter school leavers, but they show that nearly 60 per cent. of people who leave youth training scheme courses go straight into jobs and that a significant proportion of the remainder go into further training or education. The figures from several major schemes show that between 90 per cent. and 100 per cent. go into full-time jobs.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Does the Secretary of State therefore dispute the figure given by Youth Aid, that 116,000 young people will leave YTS this year and not get a job?

Mr. King: I wish that I heard more often from Youth Aid what I would regard as figures and advice that support the scheme. I hope that the House shares my horror at the latest information which suggests that, as a result of some of the critics and some of the attempts to undermine the scheme, 20,000 youngsters went through the whole of last year without taking up available places because of the propaganda of some Labour Members. I am shocked that they wasted the year when traning was available to them. I hope that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East shares my view.

Mr. Alton: How many will not get a job?

Mr. King: I do not want to bandy figures about. I have already said that 360,000 people went through the scheme, that about 60 per cent. appeared to go into jobs and that about 13 per cent. went into further education or training. That leaves 25 per cent. These are early figures and on a small sample. I believe that the figures will improve. I suspect that Youth Aid's figure is merely an extrapolation from those early figures, which were based on a sample of about 3,000 youngsters. I therefore do not endorse Youth Aid's figures. They should be treated with the same suspicion with which I treat its other communications.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East) *rose*——

Mr. King: I should like to make progress.

The youth training scheme is clearly establishing itself with employers. We shall continue to improve it by further developing and improving the quality of the training. I therefore propose to make no major changes but rather to consolidate on the excellent start and to improve the overall quality of the schemes. I propose only one minor change for the coming year—to extend eligibility to some 18-year-olds who might have been unable for some valid reason to join the scheme earlier. The Christmas guarantee will be repeated and, as in previous years, we expect to be able to provide for all unemployed 17-year-olds.

A number of initiatives have also been taken to develop links between education and employment. There is one particular new scheme which involves partnership——

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): In view of the interest of the House in wages councils, will my right hon. Friend tell us the Government's present attitude to them? We have heard that there is to be a review of them, and many right hon. and hon. Members believe that they continue to create unemployment.

Mr. King: I know that my hon. Friend listened carefully to what I said in our previous debate on this matter. I cannot add to that now, but I shall say a word or two at the end of my speech about further work to increase employment.

I was referring to the partnership between local education authorities and the Manpower Services Commission, and the scheme to which I wish to draw attention is the technical and vocational education initiative. The first 14 projects are already into their second year. Interest in and enthusiasm for the initiative has grown steadily since it was first announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister two years ago. A second round of 48 projects, including five in Scotland, started this autumn. When the projects are all fully in operation, about 50,000 youngsters in 450 schools and colleges across the country will be taking part in what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science and I regard as one of the most important developments of its kind for many years.

There was a good deal of disappointment amongst local education authorities whose proposals were not accepted for inclusion in the initiative this year, and therefore I am glad to be able to announce that the Government are making additional resources available to the Manpower Services Commission to allow local education authorities not currently participating a further opportunity to put

[Mr. King]

forward projects for the summer of 1985 or 1986. This will mean that every local education authority has the opportunity to join in this very important initiative.

Improving the skills of young people is a very important objective. It is vital also that we improve training opportunities for people throughout their working lives. In the White Paper on training for jobs earlier this year I announced a new adult training strategy.

We are about to launch a major campaign to bring home to everybody the significance of training as an investment for the future and the key role that employers must play in this. It is clear that attitudes will not change overnight and therefore this will be a sustained campaign over the next few years, involving all those concerned with adult training. I hope that I can look for support in all parts of the House in this initiative, which is very important for our future economic prosperity.

For their part the Government are taking a number of steps to encourage further developments in the training system. We shall be increasing the range and scope of the Open Tech programme, we are reorganising the Government's own adult training programmes, and we shall double to more than 250,000 the number of adults who will benefit from training by 1986-87. It will be built up progressively to that date. About half of those helped in this way will be unemployed people, including for the first time some 50,000 of the long-term unemployed on the community programme.

I am particularly anxious that we explore every possible option to increase the range scale of training. Earlier I mentioned the role that individuals could play. I am conscious of the number of individuals who may wish to undertake particular courses for which there is no existing provision and who cannot at the moment afford to finance it for themselves. Therefore, I have published today a consultative document setting out the Government's proposals for an experimental training loans scheme for adults, to be operated on the Government's behalf by the banks and other financial institutions. In the light of comments from interested parties, I hope that we can get such a scheme running next year.

This is not a substitute for the main training provisions, but it will be a useful additional facility for people who want to back their own judgment in courses which may fall outside the general range of training provision and enable us to see whether there is a way that we can help them to help themselves.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Earlier in his remarks the right hon. Gentleman said that we did less in terms of training than our competitors—Germany, the United States of America and Japan. He also said that the Government spent as much but that employers spent less. Does he regret the abolition of the industrial training boards? What is he doing to encourage employers to devote more resources to training?

Mr. King: I do not regret the abolition of the training boards. What we have to get is a voluntary commitment to the cause of training. It is in the long-term interests of the companies involved. German, American and Japanese companies do not do it for charitable purposes. They realise the benefits that flow from improving the skills of their work force. I have already appealed to right hon. and hon. Members to make their contribution in this area—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) will stop shouting, I hope that I can appeal to him to play some part in this as well.

In their contacts with trade unions, I hope that Opposition Members will also consider the problem of apprenticeships and the matters that I put before the House in the debate last week. I referred to the much improved prospects for apprenticeships in the electrical contracting industry because of the agreement between the trade union concerned and the employers to establish a more sensible first-year starting level, which has now resulted in a trebling of the number of apprenticeships in that industry.

I turn now to the range of special employment measures. The community programme offers 130,000 places to the long-term unemployed to do work of value to the community. Some 200,000 people had the opportunity to take part in community programme schemes last year, and it has clearly been a very successful undertaking. We now intend to build on that success by introducing, for the first time, linked training and preparation for work courses to help the long-term unemployed to have the best possible chance of getting back into jobs.

The voluntary projects programme also helps to prepare unemployed people for work by providing them with constructive voluntary activity. The voluntary sector has been very much involved in this. The programme was not originally planned to continue beyond this year, but I can now announce that we have decided to extend the programme to continue next year and subsequently.

I shall be asking the MSC, which administers the scheme, to develop new types of project involving a greater commitment of volunteers' time and projects which particularly help unemployed people, who may be considering the possibility of setting up in business on their own account.

The young workers' scheme has encouraged employers to employ more young people in full-time permanent jobs at rates of pay that reflect their age and inexperience. Currently there are 70,000 young people supported by this scheme. Its future was questioned, but I can confirm that it is to be continued for the next year.

We also have to recognise that more flexible patterns of working time in industry are essential if we are to remain competitive and provide employment. Therefore, I believe it essential to develop and encourage new and different approaches to patterns of working life. I intend to continue with two experiments—the part-time job release scheme, which enables those approaching retiring age to work part-time while freeing opportunities for unemployed persons, and the job-splitting scheme, which provides a grant to an employer who splits an existing full-time job into two part-time jobs. The take-up on both schemes has been disappointing so far, but I intend to make changes designed to improve their attractiveness and thus the help that they can give to reducing the problem of unemployment.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): I know that my right hon. Friend recognises the importance of helping those now out of work whose best chance of getting employment is as part-time workers or at the lower-paid end of the market. Does he agree that one of the measures that could most usefully be taken is to raise the lower limit for

national insurance contributions very substantially above the £35·50? He might persuade the Chancellor of the Exchequer to use part of his £1·5 billion for this purpose.

Mr. King: I am afraid that I have temporarily mislaid an interesting document entitled "Jobs Ahead" in which I know that a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends canvass this proposition. My hon. Friend will recall that in my speech at the end of our last debate I referred specifically to this area and the matters raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) and said that the Government were considering them.

Those two schemes are important for exploring the options that exist for changes in the patterns of work, both in job-splitting and in part-time job release. Therefore, I am anxious that we should help those experiments to become more effective. We shall also continue the full-time job release scheme on the present basis for a further year.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Does the Secretary of State accept that the best way to increase the efficiency of the job release scheme would be to reduce the qualifying age of those who participate in the scheme? However, is that not the opposite of what he did a few months ago when he increased the age?

Mr. King: It is a bad habit of Governments to keep changing the age for the job release scheme. I think that the Labour Government changed it three times. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the problems he will discover that all the programmes have different costs. There are not limitless funds. One has to consider how best to use those funds. Therefore, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will listen to my next announcement.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. Friend give us a little more information about the job-splitting proposal because it is one of the most imaginative and forward-looking proposals the Department has ever made?

Mr. King: I am proposing that we should pay an allowance to the employer to cover the extra costs involved. We shall increase that allowance. For part-time job release no allowance is paid to the employer for any additional costs involved. Therefore, I am introducing for the first time an allowance to help the employer with his costs. I hope that that will be helpful.

My next proposal concerns the enterprise allowance scheme. That scheme has fully justified our belief that many unemployed people, if given the chance, would try to start up for themselves. The House knows that demand for assistance under the scheme has been substantial. Since the national scheme was launched, 55,000 people have benefited. In July, I announced extra resources for the scheme to seek to meet the backlog of applications that was building up. The scheme is undoubtedly creating viable businesses and in turn creating more jobs.

The figures published by my Department during the summer show that six months after the allowance had stopped—18 months after the launch of the venture—seven out of 10 of the businesses supported were still trading, and for every 100 firms established over 50 additional new jobs were created. With those encouraging results, which are exceptional for the launch of such a new venture, we shall extend the scheme for next year. We are allocating an extra £72 million next year and are making provision for the expenditure of £125 million and £128 million in subsequent years. That will enable the commission to increase the programme by 25 per cent. to provide for an intake of about 1,250 new entrants every week. That is for unemployed people. Where there was previously a blank in the programme this will now mean an opportunity for over 60,000 people to start up on their own from the ranks of the unemployed. I know that the House will want to welcome that warmly.

Those comments and announcements summarise the effects in my area of responsibility of the autumn statement. But I do not want the House to be under any illusions that this is the end of our approach to the deep-seated and difficult problems of unemployment. I have made clear to the House that we see unemployment as the most difficult and most serious problem facing the Government. I am pleased to have been able to have made certain announcements today that will help. I confirm, as I said previously, that further work is proceeding on a number of other approaches to the problem. To those who seek to chastise the Government, facing as we are the most difficult and modern scourge of unemployment, I give the assurance that we shall not rest until we see a real improvement for the British people.

5.34 pm

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): I do not question the commitment of the Secretary of State for Employment to attempting to reduce unemployment—I believe that he is sincere in that aim—but the intention to do anything about unemployment is missing. Even in the United States, President Reagan has gone into severe deficit to improve the economic situation there. There should be some mild attempt by the Government to release funds for the improvement of the infrastructure even though it would add slightly to inflation. People, even some Conservative Members, are looking to the Government to do that.

The point has often been made in the House that many people need better homes and that unemployment among bricklayers, joiners, and so on, is great. We are continually asked—it may be a simplistic question—whether it is beyond the powers of Government to marry the need for homes with the need for work among people in the construction industry.

Once again, as has been increasingly the case in recent years, Scotland and Scottish legislation have been firmly relegated to the tail end of the Government's considerations. That trend has been evident since the Scottish National party representation was reduced in the 1970s, and consequently the political pressure of the Scottish people has been reduced. In the 1970s, Scottish issues, in particular the issue of self-government, were well to the fore in this political arena. That is not now the case. The simple reason is that the Government believe that Scotland does not count and that the opinions of the Scottish people do not matter.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), dealing with North sea oil, as he calls it—I call it Scottish oil—said that historians of the future would wonder what use, if any, was made of it. He thought that there might have been an argument between the Left and the Right as to how the oil should be used, but historians will also want to ask why Scotland was the only country in which oil was discovered and which ended

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up worse than it was before. Other countries where oil has been discovered have gained some development, some improvement, some economic advancement, but Scotland, alas, appears to have lost out.

There is nothing of relevance in the Gracious Speech to the severe problems faced by Scotland. We have heard that there will be no change in economic policy. Contrary to the propaganda efforts of the Secretary of State for Scotland, Scotland is not leading the way out of the recession and is not even recovering to any extent.

That view is not SNP propaganda, but is contained in the latest quarterly report of the Fraser of Allander Institute. I was disappointed to learn that there will be no change in the fortress Falklands policy. Almost £700 million has been spent this year on maintaining that policy. When people in Scotland ask what is happening to all the money from our oil, we tell them exactly where it is going. It has been spent on fortress Falklands, on the Trident missile programme and in keeping hundreds of thousands of Scots unemployed.

I contrast the cost of the Falklands policy with the position in other islands a good deal nearer to the British mainland—the Western Isles of Scotland. Members of its council are visiting London this week to lobby Scottish Members about the dire straits in which the islands find themselves as a result of Government policies.

The Western Isles islands council cannot even afford to spend up to the mean guideline laid down by the Secretary of State for Scotland and will have to cut essential services drastically. What about the principle of the "interests of the islanders being paramount" operating for the Western Isles?

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that oil has been discovered in the county of Dorset and that more oil is about to be discovered there, but that the inhabitants of that county have never suggested that the oil should be kept solely for the benefit of the people of Dorset?

Mr. Stewart: We would regard that as English oil. The oil that I was talking about was discovered in the Scottish sector of the North sea. That is the official designation of the oilfields; there are no fields south of the border. When there were gas fields off the coast of England, we paid 50 per cent. more for that gas than did the rest of the United Kingdom.

I deplore the absence in the Gracious Speech of any reference to the merchant service. The Government appear to be indifferent to the appalling way in which the size of the Merchant Navy has been decreasing over the past five years. If they do not worry about the employment or trading aspects, should they not at least show some anxiety about the defence aspect? It seems that they are not worried even about that. They simply say that the Merchant Navy must become more competitive. In a maritime nation, that is dangerous indifference.

I cannot see how the Chancellor of the Exchequer's removal of the tax allowance for seafarers will help the Merchant Navy to become more competitive. It will lead to demands for higher pay, which will lead to greater difficulty in meeting foreign competition, and thus add to the 30,000 seafarers from the British merchant marine who have been thrown on the dole in the past five years.

I welcome the sensible proposal to allow citizens on holiday to exercise their right to vote. I welcome also the intention to introduce a national prosecution service on the model of the procurators fiscal in Scotland, which is a long overdue protection for the citizen in England and Wales. I also welcome the Bill to improve occupational pension rights of people who leave schemes before reaching pensionable age. Those are all minor but worthy advances.

However, there is nothing in the Gracious Speech to foster any belief that the Government have learnt anything. Existing unemployment levels cannot go on for ever. The explosion point will come, and the doubts of many Conservative Members underline that fact.

Speaking about unemployment on Thursday last week, the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) suggested that crofters in the Western Isles worked their crofts, yet claimed unemployment benefit. He said that they helped substantially to distort the Scottish unemployment figures. I wrote to the hon. Gentleman to tell him that I would comment on his remarks and I am sorry that he is not here. His speech demonstrated his ignorance of the position. Let him investigate the income from an average croft and take into account the fact that many crofters are weavers and, as self-employed people, do not appear in the unemployment records. Let him check on the number of crofters in the Scottish unemployment figures. I agree with one part of the hon. Gentleman's speech. He said that we should learn a lesson from Norway. The lesson is that the Norwegians had the sense to opt for independence for Norway.

Scotland faces the question of survival in more ways than one. We face it in an economic sense, a cultural sense and an institutional sense. No help will come from the Government and it is unlikely that help will come from this place. It is up to all Scottish Members to face the political realities that confront our people.

5.44 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): The right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) always speaks with great sincerity on Scottish matters, about which he knows a great deal. I wish to direct my remarks to the United Kingdom as a whole.

We can all agree that unemployment is an unmitigated evil and a major problem facing our society. I remember when unemployment reached 1 million in 1972. I was a Minister at the time and my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for Employment, who was assisting us admirably, will remember that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) came across the Floor and thumped the Government Dispatch Box in rage when unemployment reached 1 million.

I had some responsibility for regional policy, and that work confirmed my view that unemployment was very much a regional problem. By the time that I was unceremoniously ejected from office by an ungrateful electorate, unemployment had come down to 600,000. It took only two years for it to rise to 1·6 million while the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) was Secretary of State for Employment. We do not need lessons on unemployment from the Labour party. Indeed, the fact that there are more than four times as many Conservative Back Benchers as Labour Members present for the debate demonstrates the seriousness with which we view the problem and the cavalier approach of the Opposition.

I greatly welcome the measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. I have some suggestions to make to him and one is that, bearing in mind the regional nature of unemployment, we must increase the mobility of labour. The lack of mobility has been a curse since the war. Our education system, to some extent, and our crazy housing system since 1918, to a great extent, have encouraged rigidity. People have stayed rooted in one area, and that has added to the unemployment problem.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry is to reply to the debate and I wish to put some points to him. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment said that industry had lost markets throughout the world. That is a fundamental factor in our comparative failure to take advantage of the move out of recession.

I make a plea to the Government that we should not be deluded into adopting protectionism, because that is a dangerous economic illusion. Other countries operate protectionism, but they are less vulnerable than we are. The idea that we can make our industry more efficient and dynamic and recapture markets by wrapping our firms in the cotton wool of protectionism is a dangerous delusion.

It is ironic that Labour Members plead loudly for aid for the Third world, yet immediately squawk when underdeveloped countries establish a textile industry and seek to sell their goods abroad and say that they must not be allowed to do so and that our industries must be cocooned in cotton wool against the barbarian hordes without. I do not believe that the Government will go down that path. Even the previous Labour Government set their face against it, but that does not seem to be the present policy of the Opposition.

During questions on the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement today, I quoted—correctly, I thought—the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan). The right hon. Gentleman said that he thought that I had got the quotation wrong. I am the first to apologise if I make an error and for the sake of greater accuracy I quote what, as far as I can gather, the right hon. Gentleman said at Blackpool on 28 September 1976:

> "We used to think that you could just spend your way out of recession and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting government borrowing. I tell you in all candour that that option no longer exists; and that in so far as it ever did exist, it worked by injecting inflation into the economy. And each time that has happened, the average level of unemployment has risen. Higher inflation followed by higher unemployment. That is the history of the last 20 years".

According to my records, that is what the right hon. Gentleman said, and there is much common sense in it. We, and above all the Opposition, should heed his words.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to taxation, but it is a matter of what one means by that. I happen to believe that if we are to get the economy going one particular policy should be pursued rather more vigorously than it has been. I refer to the need to spread the ownership of shares more widely throughout the country. About 20 years ago I and the late lamented Viscount Macmillan formed the constitution of the Wider Share Ownership Council. With great enthusiasm we advocated our cause, that every man should be a capitalist and so on, but very little progress was made as successive Chancellors of the Exchequer did not take it seriously. Today, only 7·5 per cent. of this country's adult population directly own shares, compared with about 25 per cent. in the United States. Perhaps that is why the United States has been quicker than us to pull out of the recession and why it has been much more flexible.

I am sure that it would benefit our economy, industrial relations and society as a whole if we could spread the ownership of shares much more widely throughout the country. That means direct Government action. There will be another opportunity to go into the details, but it also requires our taxation system to be simpler and more intelligible for the savers and investors, the removal of the remaining disincentive effects of capital gains tax and capital transfer tax, the abolition of the ridiculous stamp duty on share transactions and the removal of restrictions on employee share schemes. We also need to encourage wider public interest in the selling of shares when public corporations are privatised.

That is why I very much hope that when the flotation of BT takes place those applying for a few shares—that may include me—will get the amount of shares they request almost in full. If there has to be any rationing, it should be at the top end. That applies to all privatisation schemes, because share ownership should be spread as widely as possible. The spread of share ownership is fundamental to democracy and to a free society. It increases the understanding of the economy and the responsibility of the individual within it. It is also a bulwark against the ever-encroaching tyranny of the state.

I hope that I am pushing at an open door when I say that the Government should encourage wider share ownership, press ahead with privatisation schemes and stimulate industry and enterprise, as that is the way that we shall secure a real and lasting improvement in employment.

5.53 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): My only comment on the speech of the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) is that we should sometimes consider whether we need highly selective import controls. If the basic industries are to be rejuvenated, we must ensure that England does not become Europe's dumping ground. I know the problems and the fears, but there is some merit in the argument for selective import controls.

I shall concentrate on four issues: employment, or unemployment, both nationally and within my constituency, the abolition of the county councils, the proposal regarding bus services, and the mining dispute. When and if abolition of the county councils takes place their functions will be transferred to joint boards, joint committees, working groups, Government agencies or district councils—all of which will have to be funded somehow. According to the Government, the reason for change is that it will increase local accountability and save money, but it will not do so and the Government cannot have their bun and eat it.

There is a need to look closely at the Government's proposals. Indeed, I hope that the Government will scrap some of them. Research should be done, and an inquiry should be made to see what the physical and financial effects of the Government's proposals will be. Indeed, I well remember the fiasco of 1974.

We should look at local government as a whole. I do not say that there is no need for change, but that change should cover the whole of local government. I have always believed that there should be some form of return to the urban authorities, as they were accountable to the people

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and were "local" government. It should be borne in mind that 70 per cent. of the expenditure of county councils goes towards the police, the fire service and public transport. If the councils are abolished, those functions will pass to the joint boards rather than to directly elected councils. That means that those services will be taken away from the local electorate, thus allowing less accountability.

What safety provisions will there be to ensure that those joint boards or Government bodies do not become selected boards, as happened with the water authorities? Indeed, there are far-reaching implications for the police service. At one time the water boards belonged to the authorities, but they are now responsible to the Secretary of State. If there is a joint board for the police that is responsible to the Secretary of State, it will bring us closer to the idea of a national police service. That is something that has been mentioned during the past 34 weeks and it should not be allowed to happen.

Centralisation will increase as the Government take the control of local government upon themselves, together with its budgets, rate and manpower levels. Unless services or personnel or both are to be drastically cut there will be no financial savings from the reorganisation. The Coopers and Lybrand study implied that there would not be savings but an increase in expenditure. If services are cut, the number of those employed by the council will also fall. Consequently, unemployment in the county town of Barnsley will increase.

In my area of south Yorkshire the possible loss of the cheap bus fare policy is of particular concern. Irrespective of any criticism of that policy, it is geared towards the area. There is a big divide between the north and the south. South of Mansfield the country alters. Indeed, the divide is becoming wider and wider. We have the lowest fares of any area within the British Isles. Senior citizens do not have to pay to travel on the buses. There are drastically reduced fares for children. There is also a service for the disabled which some of them use if they wish to go into town to shop. It is also used as a recreational service round the area.

In south Yorkshire people are asking whether those services will be retained or whether they will be lost with the abolition of the county council. The scheme is of critical importance to those in my area who are seeking work or who are in low-paid occupations. Indeed, many in my area are low paid. It is also important to families on low incomes and to those who live in rural areas. My constituency consists of about 120 square miles, much of it rural. How many objections have come from my constituents about the county's so-called high rates? Since 1978 the Secretary of State has received only one complaint about rates. So it would seem that the county councils' only sin was to be successful, and that is why they are being abolished.

Abolition of the county council will mean an increase in bus fares, but it is also proposed to abolish the national bus service. It is estimated that for Barnsley it will mean the loss of one third of its work force. This will do much harm to the cross-subsidy of road services and will be a further blow to areas in my constituency which already face the possible closure of post offices, telephone kiosks and schools. People in villages have to travel to work, go into town to shop and see a doctor, and children have to go to school. The loss of bus services will gravely affect village areas.

The estimated cross-subsidy from the services that make a profit to the services that do not is about £1½ million. The Government propose to replace that with £20 million on a tapering basis over a number of years. The operators will compete for the most lucrative services and those that do not pay will be withdrawn. We shall have a reduced and less reliable service, much higher fares, more unemployment and reduced wages.

Any increase in fares or reduction in services will hit industry, particularly the mining industry in my area. The mining industry subsidises the bus services to the collieries. That assists miners to travel on buses, and car users receive payment based upon local bus fares. If local fares increase because of the abolition of the metropolitan counties and because the south Yorkshire cheap fares scheme is abandoned, the board will have to pay a higher cost. We could do without that.

The Prime Minister made four points about the mining dispute a few days ago. She should be corrected. She said:

"In the debate on 31 July the Opposition urged the NCB to return to the colliery review procedure. The very next day the chairman of the NCB, Mr. MacGregor, made it clear in an official statement that the NCB had never departed from it."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 22.]

It did depart from it. There is nothing more pointed than that, and it started the strike. The board departed from the review procedure. If it had not, the present dispute would not have begun. Two items prove that.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Since the board has now accepted the review procedure, why does the strike continue?

Mr. McKay: The board has not accepted the review procedure. It has said that it will reconsider the future of the five collieries within the review procedure. The miners no longer trust the NCB. The men no longer trust the board to carry out its policies. They do not trust MacGregor, nor will they. It will take a long time for that trust to be built up again.

One of my constituents, Mr. Jack Fletcher, a mechanic at the colliery where I was employed as an electrician, said in a letter:

"I should also mention, Allen, that when this strike started I was going to be transferred to Cortonwood colliery. That just shows how quickly they decided to close down the Cortonwood colliery. Men were going to be transferred right up to the day they announced the closure."

It takes six and a half months to complete the review procedure. The board cut across that because it wanted to close Cortonwood in three or four weeks. A pit should be the subject of a review before it is closed. The six and a half months scheme has stood the test of time and usually there have been no problems. A meeting is convened when problems arise. An investigation is conducted and four months' notice must be given. The Prime Minister was not right in what she said in her statement.

The Prime Minister also said:

"for the first time ever the NCB, under Mr. MacGregor, has said that any miner wishing to remain a miner will be able to do so."

That is a lie because in the 1970s I was recruiting in Jarrow. It was said then that every miner wishing to remain a miner would be able to do so. This is not new. We have said that for years when recruiting. The Prime Minister said that the NCB were

"providing the most generous early retirement terms ever."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 22]

That is fair enough. They are generous, but they are for only a select few. They are for the miners who are at the right age at the right time with the right service. The maximum redundancy is £30,000, or about four years' wages. The miners have to spend that before they can collect social security benefit.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Is not the maximum payment on the present scale £36,480 for a 49-year-old man with the maximum years of service?

Mr. McKay: We are still talking about only four or five years' wages. What happens after the man has spent that money? That is the basic problem. There have been other generous schemes, such as that in the shipbuilding industry, but the fact remains that such an amount does not compensate the miners for the jobs for which they are fighting.

It is claimed that any miner wishing to remain a miner can do so. At one time, when one colliery was closed the men were moved next door. Since then the NCB has reduced the number of collieries and the average age of miners has dropped from 60 to 54. The jobs are no longer available. A miner must now take a job in a colliery far away from his original place of work. What happens if the miner cannot sell his home? What arrangements are made for the education of his children? What decisions are made about work for the rest of the family? Closing a colliery should not be a mere three-week operation. It must take at least 12 months to make arrangements for the closure.

The Prime Minister said that management should always manage. That is so, has always been so and will be so. However, management in the coal industry is different from management elsewhere. It is management by consensus and always has been. People say, "What shall we do? How shall we get rid of the problem?" The problem is Ian MacGregor. Other more capable people are available to take on the industry. I think of people such as Mike Eaton, John Kiers, Albert Tuke and Ken Moses. The four together could take on the industry and bring it back to what it was; to what it should be.

Barnsley council has produced a report about the mining industry in the area. It has set out exactly what it is, how it has run down and what it means to the area. I draw the Minister's attention to some of the significant factors in that report. The mining industry is still the largest employer in that area. In 1978-79, 49 mining apprentices, 40 mechanical and 42 electrical apprentices were appointed in the Barnsley area. In 1983-84 63 mining apprentices, no mechanical, no electrical and no surveying apprentices were taken on. There is no youth employment in the industry today. That is a problem. The miners know that if a colliery closes, no jobs are available.

The stand-by steel industry has gone. Forgemasters is running into trouble and it is ironic that BSC money is keeping it going. All these matters must be considered when we are trying to solve the unemployment problems and the mining dispute.

We have debated the mining industry's problems many times in the last 34 weeks. Hon. Members on both sides spent a long time talking about the effects of the mining dispute. It is time we discussed the causes. When we do that, we can resolve the dispute.

6.10 pm

Mr. Peter Hordern (Horsham): The Queen's Speech and the statement of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer this afternoon both demonstrated that the Government are sticking to their course in controlling inflation, bringing down prices, increasing competition and, through those measures, hoping to price people into jobs. The Queen's Speech mentioned further privatisation, which will also be helpful.

I wonder whether the House detected, as I did, that my right hon. Friend's speech gave very much the same sort of information and showed very much the same motive —a long, technical exposition about interest rates and the course of the economy during the next year—as have previous statements, as though ours was a free enterprise economy which would respond readily and quickly to any change in interest rates; as though it were a perfect economic model. Our economy is not like that. We have very different levels of employment, very different levels of economic activity and different political representation.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor referred to the benefits of sound money, with which I entirely agree. The House will know that I have always been a sound money man, and I am not likely to change now. My right hon. Friend said that the virtue of sound money and a competitive sterling exchange rate against the dollar should price our products into the market, especially the United States markets. We must think about that carefully. Our industry is not in anything like the same state as it was a few years ago, and therefore cannot take the same advantage of any opportunities offered by the exchange rate of sterling against the dollar.

There may be some dispute about how well our industry is placed. The manufacturing production index shows a figure for 1979 of 109·3, but only 96·8 at present. That is about a 15 per cent. drop in manufacturing capacity. When and if orders come from the United States, and if our manufacturers can fill them, will the capacity be available?

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): With respect to my hon. Friend, the figures show, not a drop in capacity, but a drop in output.

Mr. Hordern: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. I wish that I could believe, as he plainly does, that our productive capacity has not been affected in the same way as our manufacturing output. We all know from our constituencies of the rundown of manufacturing capacity.

The Department of Trade and Industry figures show that more and more imports are used in our consumption of important manufactured products. There are numerous examples of that, such as cotton, silk and man-made fibres. Britain has become less competitive in manufactured products at a time when our productivity has been improving. My right hon. Friend has rightly taken credit for the significant improvement in productivity in manufacturing industry during recent years, yet recently wages in manufacturing industry have been rising faster than in the past and productivity has not been doing as well. It is not a sudden deterioration. Our manufacturing production has been declining as a proportion of gross national product for many years.

It would be possible to use those statistics and portray a picture of a country in decline, yet that would not be the

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true position. Although our manufacturing capacity has declined, other measurements of our economy show that matters are progressing rather well. For example, company profits rose by 23 per cent. last year and are already up by 20 per cent. this year—an increase of 43 per cent. in under two years. It would be hard to find a similar period when company profits had increased at such a fast rate in such a short time. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor was correct to say that the increased profits are being used for manufacturing and other investment, and that such investment is higher than at any time since the 1960s.

What sort of investment is being made? I believe that it is used for labour-saving machinery. Those machines pay no national insurance contributions, they obey no employment laws, they are there to be used — and increasingly so — with greater efficiency than ever before. It is a strange position. By all past orthodox economic yardsticks, an improvement in company profits would have led to a large increase in employment. That was always the position in the 1950s and 1960s. However, a large increase in investment now does not mean an improvement in the level of employment.

During the past 20 years employment in manufacturing industry has fallen by 3 million, while there has been a doubling of employment in professional and scientific services, investment and banking. We are now told that the new revolution in information technology will mean that the additional employment in insurance, banking and other services will be threatened.

We are seeing something quite new, and we are unlikely to have any repetition of past trends in the near future.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Has my hon. Friend seen the article in the *Employment Gazette* recently, which suggested that one glimmer of hope in the rather gloomy scene was the fact that the very expensive machinery was required to be used for five or six shifts at a time, so that the possibility of increasing employment did exist?

Mr. Hordern: I have not seen that article, but I shall certainly ensure that I do. I fear that the figures show that the employment of such machinery, even if it does not replace people, makes additional employment unlikely.

What can the Government do about the problem? Although there is competition in the private sector, there is little in the public sector. I think that the way that we look at expenditure and revenue is antiquated and should be changed. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor did what his predecessors did. He delivered his autumn statement, and in February he will produce his public expenditure White Paper. Why cannot both expenditure and revenue be considered together, and why cannot public expenditure be considered, not only in relation to the submissions of each Department, but in the expenditure of that Department's relativity to unemployment?

One hopeful sign is that unemployment has been falling in America for some time. Fifteen million new jobs have been created during the past 10 years. I believe that the reasons for that improvement also apply to Britain. I want to contrast the experience of the United States with Liverpool, which I had the honour to visit just over a week ago. I thought that I should visit the city as I had been asked to write an article on unemployment. I did not feel that I could do so in the context of unemployment in my constituency, which has the lowest level in the country. Driving for three hours from London to Liverpool on the motorway is an experience—I mean this in no damaging or insulting sense—that is rather like travelling from west Berlin to east Berlin. In Liverpool there are large areas of desolation, of broken down flats, vandalised buildings and an atmosphere of very little hope.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer refers to reducing interest rates and his hopes for lower unemployment. He is talking about the free enterprise economy which flourishes in London and the south-east. The same terms do not apply in places such as Liverpool. They do not know what private enterprise is. The only place where private enterprise can be seen in Liverpool is under the railway arches. That is where business is done and where little rent is paid. That is where the willing buyer meets the willing seller in Liverpool.

Mr. Alton: The hon. Gentleman should reconsider some of his remarks. I acknowledge that there are some problems of major proportions in Liverpool, and some of them, undoubtedly, have been caused by the reduction of £140 million in the rate support grant over the past five years and by militant extremism in the city. However, about four fifths of the people of Liverpool are employed. There are many successful businesses and it does no service to members of the chamber of commerce in the city, or to successful employers, to give the city the bad name which the hon. Gentleman has implied.

Mr. Hordern: I am not attempting to give Liverpool a bad name. I am merely stating what I perceive to be the truth, having compared Liverpool with other parts of the country. If the hon. Gentleman considers that Liverpool is not in difficult straits when 86,000 people in the city are receiving supplementary benefit, he should think again.

How are these difficulties dealt with in America? If a person loses his job in New York state, he can go to Texas and find a job easily, because he is able to find somewhere to live straight away. If a person loses his job in Liverpool and moves to London or the south-east, he will not be able to find anywhere to live. The reason for that is the Rent Act. It is high time that we considered again whether we should have that sort of rent legislation.

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock) *rose*——

Mr. Hordern: The hon. Lady must forgive me for not allowing her to intervene. I do not want to detain the House for too long.

The wages councils have been referred to already and I shall be interested to hear what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has to say about them. In the United States there are no such things as wages councils. That is something that we should consider.

In New York state it is possible to buy industrial land on the Canadian border for $7,000. The local authorities in Britain have development land and there are 48,000 acres that are ready for development. Why is the land not being sold and brought into use at the best price that can be obtained for it? My hon. Friend the Minister of State is partly responsible for the regional assistance programme. We spend £640 million on regional assistance and we have been providing this form of assistance for a long time. There have been frequent departmental reviews, and when the Department of Employment last

appeared before the Public Accounts Committee on this issue its representatives explained that they were unable to determine whether regional aid did any good. What is their response? They have initiated another examination of regional aid. I understand that the results will be announced later this month. I have no doubt that regional aid will continue. It will probably be more selective, but why is it made available at all if it is not bringing in any jobs?

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Does my hon. Friend agree that regional aid distorts the market economy and creates jobs in places where manufacturing industry and service industry do not want to set up plants? As soon as the economy goes into reverse and there is a depression, the first places from which industries pull out are those where plants were established by regional aid in the first place.

Mr. Hordern: I agree with my hon. Friend, but I wish to develop my remarks. The Government should consider reviewing regional grants with a view to abolishing them. It is essential to reduce the cost of work in the regions. If the Government were to abolish employers national insurance contributions in the regions and to introduce a nil rate of corporation tax for firms operating within the regions, thus reducing the cost of work in those areas, I suggest with all humility that better results would flow, as in the United States. In New York state industry is offered interest rates in the form of tax-exempt bonds that run at 7½ per cent. for 20 years. That form of special development scheme should be considered. I do not suggest that the New York scheme is perfect, and I have no doubt that there are snags, but I am sure that it is no good treating the country as if it is one economic unit and throwing money away in areas that are not conforming to the pattern that the Chancellor has set for them. We must reduce directly the cost of work.

Where is the money to come from? I know that some of my hon. Friends are cereal farmers, or represent them, but I cannot understand why we should give cereal farmers a penny. If my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food were to go to the Council of Ministers in Brussels and shake his head sadly from side to side, we would save £1,250 million. It is my contention that regional grants should be abolished, which would save more than £600 million.

I am sure that the way ahead lies in reducing the cost of work in the regions rather than throwing money at them. I see no reason why Liverpool and other cities should not be attractive again. If new technological industries in communications, for example, can flourish anywhere in the country, there is no reason why the country as a whole should not make higher profits. That can happen if the movement of people is free and if the price of work reflects local conditions. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer says that unemployment is not an economic problem. Indeed, he says that it is a social problem. I say to him that if different methods are used we shall have, not an economic problem, but an economic opportunity.

6.28 pm

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): The hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Hordern) has told the House some home truths. We may not agree with them all—I am certain that his right hon. and hon. Friends will not agree with them all—but I want to congratulate him on presenting us with them and to say that I agree with some of his remarks. I agree especially with his suggestion that we should reduce the cost of employment. I hope that the Government will consider that in terms of regional policy, in which it could make a considerable contribution, and across a much broader spectrum. The hon. Gentleman will probably know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), the leader of the Social Democratic party, has made a number of similar proposals in recent weeks.

I would like to associate myself with the remarks of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), who spoke from the Opposition Dispatch Box, in regretting the absence from the debate of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). I associate myself and my colleagues with the sentiments expressed by the right hon. and learned Gentleman. We miss the right hon. Gentleman a great deal in the House and I am sure that the House wishes him a speedy recovery. I think that I speak for many hon. Members when I say that we also wish his wife a speedy recovery. We in this place often have great pleasure in holding offices and we drag our families into them. They have to put up with a great deal. Our hearts went out to the right hon. Gentleman's wife and we hope that she, too, will return speedily to full health.

I suspect that the debate and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement earlier in the afternoon will be seen in the public eye in the context of the abolition of the pound note and the halfpenny. I can guess what the headlines this evening and tomorrow morning will be. The Chancellor's announcement may have a certain symbolism about it in the context of the Government's record.

I do not want to go down that track because I shall begin —I wish it would happen more often from Opposition Benches—by congratulating the Government on their record on inflation over the past few years. That achievement should be recognised. The Chancellor referred to remarks made by the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), who is a former Prime Minister, and remarks have been made by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins), both of whom have been Chancellors of the Exchequer. They have all spoken about the evils of inflation and the damage that it does to the economy. Therefore, we should recognise, as I think that the country does, the Government's success in getting and keeping inflation down.

However, the country is getting to the point where it is saying, "Yes, you have achieved a lower level of inflation, but for what?" It is no good just achieving low single figures of inflation unless the Government have following through from that the growth in output and employment opportunities that everyone wants to see. It has been increasingly recognised that on that score the Government have failed. It is no good, as both this Chancellor and the previous Chancellor have done, blaming past Governments for the high unemployment rates. Amazingly, contradicting that line, the Chancellor is now saying that unemployment is caused by the success of the Government's policy.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) read out in his speech the forecast, made by the former Chancellor, this Chancellor and the Prime

[Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth]

Minister, of the recovery that was just round the corner. The country wants to see that coming about in terms of employment opportunities for many more people, particularly in the regions.

I welcome in the Queen's Speech the proposed insolvency legislation. This has a bearing on employment. Our insolvency legislation has long been out of date and damaging to many enterprises. All hon. Members will be aware of the devastating impact that the collapse of a business can have on other businesses, and particularly on small business. The Cork report was published a long time ago, and this legislation is overdue and should be welcomed.

Many people have been ruined as a result of other businesses going bankrupt, and we need legislation along the lines of the Cork report to help to keep businesses afloat and to put an administrator in long before it is possible to do so under present legislation. We should ensure, too, that the interests of small creditors are protected and that some of the rogues who have been operating in this sector and making a business out of going bankrupt are stopped. A tremendous amount can be done to help businesses. Bankruptcies have been going on at a rate of 1,500 a month, and there has been a devastating impact on other businesses. I welcome the legislation, and I am sure that the House will want to speed it through, although no doubt we shall have to look at some parts of it critically.

The country is becoming increasingly impatient with the Government's failure to succeed in the objectives that they have set themselves over the past five years. Output is only half a percentage point above what it was in 1979. We have lost 1·5 million manufacturing jobs in five years, a figure that is equivalent to the previous 20 years' loss in manufacturing employment, and manufacturing output is still 11 per cent. below that of 1979. The manufacturing trade deficit, as the House will know, for the first time went into the red, reaching a staggering figure of £5 billion in 1983. This is a dreadful record, to which the hon. Member for Horsham referred. It will be difficult for the country to recover from it.

In my constituency we have the highest level of unemployment of any county in the United Kingdom excluding the area represented by the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart). The industrial devastation that has taken place recently makes one realise that even if demand came at a rapid rate of knots we should simply not be able to respond in many sectors of our business. That is why we have not suggested that there should be an enormous expansion of demand within the economy, as some in the Labour party have suggested. We do not believe that the economy is able to absorb that demand.

Above all, we need to increase the competitiveness of our industries and services. Although the Government have paid lip-service to this, they have done little about it. The Queen's Speech illustrates this point clearly. We have the quite bogus claim, which illustrates the Government's sensitivity on this matter, that the legislation being brought in to change the status of the Trustee Savings Banks is part of the Government's programme to increase competitiveness in banking.

I was on the Committee which considered legislation on the Trustee Savings Banks and I am a member of the parliamentary committee of the Trustee Savings Banks. I have been involved in banking for much of my working life, and as anybody who knows that sector will know, the introduction of this legislation has nothing to do with competition. The legislation is needed because the legal status of the Trustee Savings Banks was left unclear by previous legislation and it has to be rectified. The legislation will not change the competitive position of banking one iota. The Trustee Savings Banks have already had their status changed and are competing on all squares with the other clearing banks in a way that I welcome, as do consumers.

This claim is symbolic of the Government's bogus attitude to competition. They constantly confuse the provisions which they introduce for privatisation with increasing competition. Bringing about the privatisation of a public corporation does not necessarily increase competition. The coming privatisation of British Telecom and of British Airways has not increased competition. Competition has been increased as a result of welcome liberalisation measures which were brought in some time before the privatisation proposals were introduced.

What is worse is that those two substantial public corporations are not being made more competitive, but are being changed from public monopolies into private monopolies. It will be much more difficult to control those monopolies, particularly BT, which has a minute regulatory office in the new establishment which has been set up under Professor Carsberg to control that vast industry, in which BT itself controls 93 per cent. of the market for telecommunications. That is not increasing competition.

In the Queen's Speech, I should have liked to see much clearer proposals for the Government's competition policy. I should have liked that policy to outline in detail what the Government are hoping to achieve, and what they see as the role of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and of the Office of Fair Trading. Under successive Secretaries of State, it has been unclear what the Government's policy aims at achieving. We should like a much more aggressive competition policy than the Government are pursuing. I hope that the Minister will make it clear that the Government intend to clarify the role of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and the Office of Fair Trading, and that they will make those bodies much more effective in busting up monopolies and oligopolies, which are to the detriment of the consumer and are destroying jobs by not increasing the competitiveness of British industry.

As part of their efforts to increase the competitiveness of industry, the Government must take many more steps in education and training. I have said in the House previously that the Government took enormous strides forward when they introduced the youth training scheme. It was an enormous achievement for the Department of Employment to get the money out of the Treasury. The Secretary of State referred to the attempts of the president of the SDP, when she was Secretary of State, to set up similar schemes. She was unable to do so because there were legitimate arguments about public expenditure at the time, just as there are now.

Although the Government started a youth training scheme, they have stunted it. I hope that the Secretary of State will be much more forthcoming than he was today about the development of that scheme. Many of us—there is a broad spectrum of opinion on this—want the scheme to be broadened and lengthened so that it fits in

more with the education and training available in other institutions, especially in higher and further education. It is no good receiving a piece of paper at the end of a year's youth training if that paper is of no value in taking further examinations so as to gain more opportunities for employment. It is important that the scheme forms the basis of a comprehensive training and education system, which Britain has needed for a long time.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that there is an overwhelming case for bringing the work of the Manpower Services Commission much closer to the work of local education authorities and the Department of Education and Science. In many constituencies, although the MSC has made noble attempts and done sterling work, it has had thrust upon it enormous responsibilities in a short period. Anyone who has been involved in training will know those responsibilities and the resources that it has been given to do the job. As a result, we are building a dual-track training system. We still have some industrial training boards, further education colleges and the good training and vocational initiatives which the Government have introduced in schools. Those developments are not co-ordinated as they should be. There is an overwhelming case for bringing them together into a comprehensive training and education system, and removing — I am sorry to tell the Secretary of State this—the MSC from the responsibilities of this Department and putting it under the Department of Education and Science.

Another area in which I hope the Government will take further steps to improve our competitiveness is industrial relations. I shall not discuss the miners' dispute, because we have made our views known in the House and elsewhere. The sooner that miners vote with their feet and get back to work, the better it will be for them and for the country. All that I would say about recent events is that the British Leyland dispute illustrates how right some of us were, when the trade union legislation was discussed by the House last Session, to have pointed out that the Bill would be a charter for unofficial action. I hope that the Government will reconsider quickly the Bill that we passed last Session. The AUEW has not made the British Leyland dispute official and has, therefore, avoided the legislation. We forecast that that would happen and that unofficial action, which represents most of the action taken in this country, would not be covered by the legislation. If industrial action is taken, it is vital that proper ballots are held.

The Government should also redress their attitudes towards worker participation and industrial democracy. They are sticking their head in the sand by constantly resisting the fifth directive and the Vredeling directive from Europe, which are now modest measures as a result of the amendments introduced by Mr. Ivor Richard. I wish that the Government and some members of the CBI would realise that the proposals contained therein are not an impediment to efficiency but are a means of getting the full backing of the work force and overcoming the industrial disputes that have damaged British industry for many years.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Cant.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: The hon. Gentleman says, "Cant", but all that he need do is to consider some of our major competitors, who have beaten the pants off British industry. They operate systems of industrial and worker participation, which many of the major private British industries, including some with which I have been associated, already operate. Unfortunately, not enough of them are doing so, and we need legislation and those directives to ensure that a change takes place. It would enormously enhance the competitiveness of British industry, and that is why we support it.

Although the extension of the schemes that the Secretary of State announced this afternoon is welcome, many of them are increasingly perceived by the young as palliatives. They do not take the schemes seriously because there are no jobs at the end of the training period, which is a dreadful development. They lose all faith in the relevance of those schemes to their future lives. If the Government do not reverse their economic policies and begin to expand demand steadily, for which there is broad support in the country, the money that they are pouring into the schemes will go down the drain, because youngsters do not consider them relevant to their lives or as providing them with employment opportunities.

6.47 pm

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): Following what the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) said about how our hearts and thoughts go out to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and his wife, the House will be pleased to know that, in reply to a letter from the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, I received a handwritten note from my right hon. Friend recording that both he and his wife are making good progress.

The Queen's Speech is always an equation between what we can do and what we say we cannot do. I commend to the Government the suggestion that, after four years of fairly good progress, we should move forward to a combination of what we can do and what we must do. The problem is one of national attitude compared with that of our competitors. Often in our industrial society we are driven reluctantly forward against the wall of what we cannot do, whereas our rivals, especially the United States and Japan, are distinctly "can do" societies. That is important, because even with a non-interventionist Government — I am not much of an interventionist myself—there are inevitable partnerships in which they must play a part. The time has come for the Government to focus as much attention on the creation of wealth as they have focused on how we should spend that wealth by their taxation policies.

The Government have achieved very good progress over the past five years. I was delighted to hear the hon. Member for Stockton, South acknowledge that, particularly the progress on reducing inflation. However, there are big problems. Unemployment, as the leading one, has reached crisis proportions, particularly with regard to the talent that we are now wasting. I commend particularly to the Department of Trade and Industry a bit more optimism and confidence that, in partnership with industry, it can conquer the problems. It has a duty to retain and encourage that partnership so that the problems can be conquered.

I declare an interest as an engineer and industrialist. I commend to the Government the basic tenet of engineers, which is that problems are there to be solved, not to be talked about. The paramount question that the Government must face and resolve is their own position and the power that they can and should exercise to play

[Mr. Kenneth Warren]

their essential part in conquering unemployment. The Government may not wish to be an active investor of taxpayers' earnings, even in enterprises responsible to Government. I recognise that when such enterprises escape into private ownership, they are doing exactly what the Conservative party wants. However, many others still remain — those involved in energy production and supply, transport production and supply, and steel, for a while perhaps. I plead with the Government to recognise that the public sector borrowing requirement is a constraint that is affecting the competitiveness and profitability of some of those state companies. I ask them to look at the constraints being practised, which are limiting production and profits.

At the same time, there are many things that the Government can do without expenditure to increase wealth and employment. The first involves the hurdy-gurdy of public purchasing. I ask the Treasury to get to grips with that problem and to recognise that in many public purchasing ventures—for instance the 10,000 computers that the Ministry of Defence now has on order—there is much merit in examining the value of buying British. In many advanced technology products, the labour content is about 50 per cent. of the whole value, and of that some 40 per cent. is recycled as tax and national insurance. Therefore in the end one could even overprice a British bid by 20 per cent. and still spend no more than if one imported the product. If one said that British industry would take advantage of that, the answer is simple. Those engaged in Government purchasing should get in some better buyers. They would know when the pants had been taken off the Government. A bit of incentive in improving public purchasing standards is long overdue.

That also applies to infrastructure and various capital projects. The Government should look more broadly at the value of investment in capital expenditure, for instance the way in which the very presence of the M4 has created a silicon valley in the south and the M25 is already affecting employment and business opportunities in the London area. I hope therefore that the Government will look not Department by Department but across Departments at the way in which wise investment can, pretty cheaply, create much more employment than by direct investment through regional assistance.

When I consider the creation of new businesses, I am conscious of the tremendous amount of work that has been done by Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry, and I compliment them on it. However, could they also look at the problems of setting up businesses? If one wants to create a new business, there are 14 separate steps, 12 involving Government agencies. If one wants to employ someone, there is a minimum of 23 separate steps with which one must comply. In that cat's cradle, there is much that Government can do to untangle their own rules and regulations to make the creation of business employment much simpler.

I should like to give an example. A constituent of mine managed to get a Government loan backed by a bank loan and went through all the steps required, but as soon as the district council heard that he was in business it cracked down on the rates and put him back on the dole. Therefore there must be unity not just between Departments in Government, but the district councils——

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Was it a Tory council?

Mr. Warren: The district councils have their own part to play. The hon. Gentleman can make his own speech if he withdraws to his empty Back Benches.

I should like to refer to the Government as a sponsor. It is difficult for individual industrial companies to criticise Governments when so often they are the biggest single customer that they have, either directly or indirectly. What one hears nowadays strongly and stridently from trade associations such as the United Kingdom Information Technology Organisation, set up with the blessing of the Department of Trade and Industry, the Electronic Engineering Association and the Society of British Aerospace Companies is that they find that the Government are not carrying out their part of the partnership through the sponsorship that they need to make progress in their own product areas. Those are not just small operations. In the aerospace industry alone, there are companies in over 330 constituencies.

Therefore, the criticisms from the trade associations and the Council of Engineering Institutions about the failure to link the requirements identified by the Department of Trade and Industry in its excellent information technology programme and the output that is planned by the Department of Education and Science show that there is a real problem facing the growth of British industry. The boom year in computing was 1978, but there are now more job vacancies than there were then, with fewer people to fill them. Vacancies in computing for qualified scientists and engineers—not just technicians or production workers—are estimated at 30,000, with no sign of abatement. In fact, the figure is more likely to increase.

Therefore, I ask the Department of Trade and Industry to establish a practical liaison with the Department of Education and Science to recognise the problem as it is and to find out what can be done to solve it quickly. I should like to illustrate the essence of the problem. It is not just that jobs cannot be filled now but the way in which we are watching competitiveness begin to evaporate from engineering in this country compared with our principal competitors.

The science policy unit at Sussex university—I am privileged to be on its court—has just published some interesting data on the way in which basic science standards in this country, on which we pride ourselves, are falling behind those of our principal competitors. If one tries to establish measurements in that area, one always has to make qualifications, but one or two are worth looking at. If one wants to make progress in industry and exports, one must be able to compete in the United States of America. Therefore, one must register a patent in the United States. In the past 10 years West Germany has registered about 25 per cent. of foreign patents in the United States, but we have dropped down from 20 per cent. to 8 per cent. The Japanese have increased their total from 8 per cent. to 35 per cent. In other words, the Japanese are registering four times as many patents when we have cut ours by half.

Once the patent is out, one presents a scientific paper so that one can shout about one's goods from the rooftops and begin to get entrepreneurs to come to one. We used to have about the largest single share outside the United States. Over the past 10 years the number of papers that

we have presented has gone down by about 10 per cent. but the number of Japanese papers has risen by 30 per cent. The number of times that other people refer to our papers has gone down by about the same amount but, significantly, the Japanese figure has risen by about 50 per cent.

Those may seem dry statistics, but they are the essence of the creativity of engineering and industry and its ability to get into the markets in the 1990s. The United Kingdom weaknesses listed in the data are frightening. Our present weaknesses are clinical medicine, general engineering, general chemistry, nuclear and particle physics, applied mathematics and metallurgy. Our best, I am happy to say, is electronics, but there are also some strange areas at the top of the list — public health, veterinary medicine, pathology, ecology, tropical medicine and the science of anaesthetics. I might be able to make something out of that if I were in the Opposition, but as a loyal supporter of the Government I shall not seek to do so. So far, Japan has not really got ahead of us in applying technology, but the seeds have been sown for our markets to be ripped away in the latter part of this decade and in the 1990s. We do not spend enough of our gross domestic product on basic research. Our main competitors spend twice as much. The Japanese now have four times as many academic researchers working in their laboratories as we have in ours. One cannot ignore those basic statistics. They are allied to job prospects. Co-ordination between the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Education and Science is essential, and it must not just be talked about—it must be acted upon.

With regard to the Government's fiscal practices, I have referred to the concern of trade associations about the Government's sponsorship role. At the CBI small businesses seminar last week great concern was expressed about the loss of capital allowances, especially in the starting up of new businesses. I hope that the Government will not consider it a U-turn of any kind to consider the increasing evidence of the way in which this restrains new business opportunities. In this respect, co-ordination between the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury is vital if the marvellous initiative of the former to launch cable television and communication in this country is not to be completely lost.

My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Hordern) referred to regional grants. On this I speak not just because I come from an area which does not have regional grants but because I come from the practice of engineering and I know that it is nonsense for people at one end of the country receiving regional grants to compete with people at the other end of the country, making the same bids for the same business with the taxpayer subsidising the bids. There was recently a bold and delightful statement to the effect that a foreign company was investing £500 million in a new factory in Scotland which would create 550 new jobs. Analysis shows, however, that the taxpayer is putting £100 million towards that, which is about £180,000 per job. According to Department of Education and Science figures, that is roughly the cost of training 10 qualified scientists and engineers over the next three years. The entire project, therefore, is equivalent to producing 5,500 qualified scientists and engineers between now and 1987. The extraordinary thing is that that is precisely the deficit that the United Kingdom Information Technology Organisation predicts for 1987 in terms of its requirement for qualified engineers. Need I say more? I put it to the Government that industry, employment and education must act together and not in separate compartments. If the "star chamber" system can reduce Government expenditure by many millions of pounds, cannot that talent be reorganised to produce a star chamber mark 2 dedicated to forcing Ministers to concentrate on the addition of wealth to the economy?

7.3 pm

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): Nothing in the debate so far has created a sense of reality. The House of Commons is probably the last place in which unemployment and job provision can be debated with sensitivity because we are not equipped to do so. Indeed, the House is notoriously inept at sensing the mood of frustration arising out of mass unemployment. I hope that the Minister appreciates that I speak as one who is not classified among the loony Left of my party, although some may think that I should be by the time I sit down.

I have a constant, nagging fear, which must be shared by many sensible, thinking people in this country, that unless we make startling gains in creative employment we shall face not just total upheaval but possibly further civil disturbance. For several years now I have noticed that young people in society are seeking all kinds of ways to opt out of the boredom of unemployment and the uselessness of short-term work without any end product. People ask why youngsters dye their hair funny colours, indulge in drug abuse, sneer at politicians and ignore their parents' wishes. I believe that it all stems from the lack of a sense of creativity because there is no productive work for them.

I left school when I was 14. I left on a Friday and I was down the mine on the Monday. I might still be in that industry if slackness of trade had not led to the single men being paid off. I then cycled 18 miles to work in the forge of an engineering factory. When I was 16 I was given the opportunity to serve an engineering apprenticeship. That was no mean achievement in those days because there were 2 million unemployed out of a population of 46 million and one had to prove one's ability both at night school and at work. Above all, however, working a 47-hour week, one felt that one was achieving something and bettering oneself. One learned about Pythagoras, having never heard of Plato, as well as doing something important for society. Then came the outbreak of war in 1939, for which this country was so ill-prepared. But for the decision in the mid-1930s to take on apprentices so that they gained skill and knowledge, we should have been in a hell of a state trying to get our war effort up to standard. As it was, the skilled helped the semi-skilled and the semi-skilled helped the unskilled, and that is how it was right through the 1950s and into the 1960s.

Engineering then suddenly became unfashionable, due to our education system. So far, even if salaries are better, no Government have corrected the idea that engineering — whether it be electronic engineering, chemical engineering, marine engineering or general engineering —is not a desirable profession. Therein lies the root of the decline in our manufacturing base and our lack of competitiveness. In the 1930s people realised that, even if there was not work for all, the apprentices and craftsmen were needed to maintain a base of technical knowledge. Regrettably, however, we have not done that in the past 15 years.

[Mr. Ted Garrett]

The Minister has told us that more money is to be spent on all kinds of technical, semi-technical and scientific education, but it is too late. I do not blame him personally. I do not even blame the Government. The problem goes much further back. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) said, we lack the personnel necessary for the recovery of our manufacturing base. In *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Observer* and *The Guardian* one constantly finds page after page of advertisements for people qualified in science, engineering, electronics and so on—project engineers, design engineers, systems engineers and the rest. In my time, those people worked through apprenticeship schemes. They progressed to production engineers through their own skills, achievements and acquisition of technical knowledge. That does not happen now. If, by some miracle, the number of skilled men were to surge upwards, it would take at least five years, and we are already missing out on some of the benefits of the American recovery.

I spent two days in the midlands looking at five machine tool plants. Each firm stated that its order book was improving and that it wanted more money to invest and capitalise on that improvement, but that it could not get money from the banks because it was not profitable. The firms also stated that they were desperately short of technical people. There are two technical training schools in my constituency. We got one of them after I made my maiden speech more than 21 years ago. I asked the then Minister, now Lord Marsh, for a technical school for training and retraining people, and we got it. The other school is partly sponsored by private medium-sized firms and partly by local authorities. Both those establishments have vacancies that they cannot fill because there is no money to pay for training. They are equipped with numerical control machines, and have fully skilled and trained instructors. The Minister may be able to do something about that. The staff fear that they may lose their jobs because of cuts and that they will never be able to obtain, from the thousands of unemployed, sufficient people to use the establishment to the full.

We must return to the four-year apprenticeship system. It is generally accepted in the House that training a person for one year is no good. Impetus is lost because, during the ninth or tenth month, the young person becomes uncertain and knows that he will soon be back on the dole. In four years, an apprentice widens his scope and gains greater knowledge and enthusiasm, so that when jobs are available he is better equipped to take them. The entire community then benefits.

A better climate may lead to more profitability, for example, in engineering. If a company makes a good product, it may be able to get loans from a bank. Banks make favourable noises about lending money to aid industry, but employers receive an unbelievable number of rebuffs when they seek money from banks. The reason for that is that companies are not sufficiently profitable to look good on the balance sheets.

We must reconsider training, and that includes training ladies. Many young women could fulfil a useful occupation if they were given the chance of training. I hope that the Minister will consider what I have said. If my analysis is not entirely correct, at least some of it is.

I welcome the decision to curtail the number of schemes available for aid and to introduce a simplified version. Now is the time to spread knowledge on a wider scale than the Government have done hitherto, especially in older firms that employ up to 50 people. Those companies can get most value from such aid. I hope that what I have said will sink into the Government's head.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): I am grateful to the hon. Member for bringing us back to 10-minute speeches.

7.16 pm

Mr. Ian Lloyd (Havant): The House always listens with great care and attention to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett), not only because he is not a member of the loony Left but because what he says is always interesting and important.

I am tempted to take up the hon. Gentleman's points about training but, alas, the restriction on time prevents me from saying so. The Select Committee on Energy visited Japan in June. We visited the Sharp corporation, which employs 36,000 people. Its products are to be seen all over this country. It had just built a training centre for 650 people, which looked something like a Hilton hotel. That will give the House an idea of the emphasis that the company places on training. It believes that no skill is likely to remain valid for more than three or four years. Its programme is to retrain 6,000 employees at a time. That is the world with which we must compete and that must dictate our views about and attitudes to training.

I wish to touch on a point made by the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) about "Plan for Coal", although I do not wish to be diverted down that alley now. I examined all four documents of "Plan for Coal" with the greatest care last week and found 23 references to economic mining, productivity, competition at low cost levels and so on. Above all, I found a figure—I mentioned it on television—of 60 million tonnes of new mine capacity which is to replace 60 million tonnes lost through closures. We must not forget that that is an inherent part of "Plan for Coal", which was signed by Mr. McGahey and everyone who took part in the discussions. We cannot escape from that, nor can Mr. Scargill and those whom he misleads.

The Leader of the Opposition makes colourful and acceptable contributions to our debates, and there is no harm in that. However, that colour should not confuse his statistical vision. As a politician, he is entitled to exploit, interpret and criticise figures, but he is not entitled to invent them. I shall give the House two examples of his inventions. He said:

"in the 17 months between the last Queen's Speech—the last undertaking to increase economic prosperity and reduce unemployment . . . inflation has increased by 27 per cent."

I checked that extremely carefully. The economic statistics for October show that, from June 1983 to December 1984, inflation was 5·5 per cent. If the Leader of the Opposition introduces statistics and claims to base his arguments and views on them, the least we can expect is that they should be accurate. Of course, we would permit one mistake, but not two.

The right hon. Gentleman went on to say that there had been a decline of £35 billion in total investment since 1979. I also checked that figure, and it is far from declining. Gross domestic fixed capital formation for 1979 was £43 billion, for 1980 £41 billion, for 1981 £38 billion,

for 1982 £40 billion and for 1983 £42·3 billion. There is no decline of £37 billion there. Where did the Leader of the Opposition get the figure from? Does he expect the country to take him seriously when his statistical homework is so poor? He might have had a case—he might have thought of the rate of increase between 1973 and 1979 and have compared this with that. But the rate of increase in those years was from £33·5 billion to £43·9 billion. There is, therefore, no case.

The Leader of the Opposition then accused my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister of quoting Keynes. A long time ago—longer than I care to remember—I met a distinguished and white-haired gentleman at Cambridge. He had just come back from negotiating the loan. He was Lord Keynes and I sat gratefully at his feet and spent two or three years studying his theories and economics. If I can claim knowledge of anything it is of what Lord Keynes said and of his arguments. I was therefore astonished that the Leader of the Opposition should say:

"I recommend to the Prime Minister almost anything else that John Maynard Keynes wrote."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 17-20.]

Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition will shelter behind the word "almost". He then accused my right hon. Friend of misusing Lord Keynes' name and philosophy. Perhaps I might quote some of what Lord Keynes said.

"I criticise state socialism . . . because it misses the significance of what is actually happening; because it is, in fact, little better than a dusty survival of a plan to meet the problem of fifty years ago, based on a misunderstanding of what someone said 100 years ago . . . I do not believe that the intellectual elements of the Labour Party will ever exercise adequate control; too much will always be decided by those who do not know at all what they are talking about; and if—which is not unlikely—the control of the party is seized by an autocratic inner ring, the control will be exercised in the interests of the extreme Left Wing—the section of the Labour Party which I shall designate the Party of Catastrophe."

Mr. Prescott: Keynes was a Liberal.

Mr. Lloyd: This is what Lord Keynes said about the Liberal party:

"There is no place in the world for a Liberal Party which is merely the home of out-of-date or watery Labour men."

Some time ago I argued that the crude unemployment figures were no guide to policy and that we should examine the ratio of output with a high probability of sale to those who are effectively, necessarily and indispensably employed in their occupations. I suggested that that denominator should be taken as the crucial index and that it should not include those who were employed for any other reason, including social reasons, sympathy or anything else. I concluded that some 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of the so-called statistically employed at that time did not and would not fall within any conceivably rigorous definition of employment. We were carrying and concealing—I have said that often—some 2 million to 3 million unemployed. The events of the past 10 to 15 years, like the falling of the water level of a lake that has been drained, have revealed those pockets of unemployment because productivity in the firms and industries concerned did not fall at an adequate rate. Nothing has changed. The concealed unemployment is now stark. Although it has been revealed, we hear on every side arguments about defending jobs. In that regard the people who mislead the miners and others have much to answer for. There are means by which to defend jobs and there are means that are utterly ineffective and destructive when it comes to producing employment. The latter are strikes and occupations of factories or of rigs such as we recently saw at Cammell Laird. They are high tax and high energy costs.

Where are the lowest unemployment figures? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State today mentioned the United States and Japan. The United States is a continent and energy rich; Japan is an island and energy poor. In the long term, Japanese experience and conditions are therefore more relevant to us. I confirmed that judgment when the Select Committee was in Japan in June. The great boom of the 1950s and 1960s was directly related to low real costs of energy and vast quantities of it. During the 1970s, Governments taxed energy until the kilocalories screamed. We wonder why our entire energy-based industrial civilisation is finding it difficult to get moving again. What is Japan doing? The answer is relevant to us. I have news for Mr. Scargill. Japan imports energy on a large scale — 83 per cent. of it in 1982. Energy represents 50 per cent. of the value of its imports and 74 per cent. of that is accounted for by oil. Its policy is to reduce dramatically its dependence on oil.

Japan's demand for coal in 1982 was 95 million tonnes —roughly the same as ours. In 1978 it was 78 million tonnes and it rose to 97 million tonnes last year. That represents a substantial increase over the 61 million tonnes of 1960, of which only 50 million tonnes was indigenous Japanese coal. Coal production in Japan has been reduced steadily. Indigenous production has been reduced from 50 million tonnes to 16 million tonnes because it is all high-cost coal and an efficient energy-intensive economy wants no high-cost coal. However, coal consumption continues to rise. It is based on imports that have risen from 58 million tonnes in 1979 to 92 million tonnes in 1982. In 1985, 8GW of generating capacity will be coal-fired—in 1995, 21GW will be coal-fired. Japan has not turned its back on coal. The latter figure will represent 12 per cent. of its electricity demand and the increase in coal consumption for electricity generation will be from 15 million tonnes to 33 million tonnes. The entire increase will be met by low-cost imports from Australia and the United States. On that basis, a small but significant proportion of the extremely efficient Japanese energy performance will be met.

Even more important is Japan's nuclear power. Japan already has 26 major nuclear reactors—13 boiling water reactors, 11 pressurised water reactors of the type that we are having an inquiry about at Sizewell and two others. They produce 18 GW or 12·7 per cent. of Japan's electrical generating capacity. In Britain, 6 per cent. of our generating capacity is nuclear-powered. That might seem disturbing but we should consider what is planned. We should examine the future in the country from which our major industrial competition will undoubtedly come. Under construction are seven BWRs and five PWRs, producing 12 GW or 22 per cent. of generating capacity, by 1993. Under the heading of co-ordinating for construction, which I should not like to define, there are five PWRs and one other reactor of a type that is yet to be decided producing another 5·2 GW. Under the heading of planning are four BWRs, two PWRs and three others of a type yet to be decided producing another 9·4 GW. That gives a total of 26 GW or, by the end of the century, 54·9 GW of nuclear-powered electric generating capacity. That will mean 28 per cent. of their needs by 1990 and 38 per cent. by the year 2000.

[Mr. Lloyd]

This is of the utmost significance to the United Kingdom. The Japanese are convinced that with their unique energy dependence they must become the most energy-efficient country in the industrial world. From what I saw and was able to judge, they have every intention of achieving that objective, and their performance in the past suggests that they will be well able to do it. If this comes about and we in the United Kingdom go on as we are—I cannot find words to describe what is happening in the coal industry; it is a self-destructive phenomenon of the most astonishing and depressing kind — against the nuclear programme, although we have a significant nuclear industry, in comparison with what we saw in Japan the chances of the British muclear industry competing in what the Japanese expect to be a market for 3,000 pressurised water reactors world-wide by the middle of next century are extremely small.

Hon. Members may ask how the Japanese have done this, how they have overcome public opposition and how they have dealt with the protests which accompany nuclear development not only in the United Kingdom but, to be fair to ourselves, in the United States. It is interesting to discover that, whereas we have had one public hearing, the Japanese have had 14 in seven years. They have nuclear study courses both for school teachers and for students. Nuclear power is taught in schools not only on a scientific level, which we may well do, but as a question of public policy on the social, energy needs level. They have promoted nuclear power public relations halls in all the major prefectures of Japan. The public utilities built them. They are open to the public. They have open days. They say, "Come and see what it will do for you, how and why". Some of our own advanced gas-cooled reactors have similar facilities. I am unable to make a comparison of the extent to which both are made available, but I suspect that the Japanese are ahead of us.

The Japanese also have financial incentives financed by the electric power development acceleration tax of 445 yen per thousand kilowatt hours of electricity consumed. Of this, 160 yen is spent for the benefit of local area education, cultural sports and recreation amenities and 285 yen is spent to finance work on the development of alternative energy sources. If we applied such a tax—roughly £2 per thousand kilowatt hours—the sum raised in the United Kingdom for these purposes would be £484 million.

Prefectures in which the generation of electricity exceeds half their needs receive in addition a Government grant for electricity supplied to other areas. The total subsidies for the promotion of nuclear power plant siting in the fiscal year 1981 was about £81 million, of which roads, sports, recreation and education took some 71 per cent.

Japan claims to lead the world in the efficient use of energy, and there is no doubt that it has the world's lowest unemployment figures. The question that I leave with the House is the extent to which this is cause and effect. I believe that that nexus is powerful and that we ignore it at our peril. This is where the main high technology competition of the western world will originate. Can we compete on the basis of high-cost coal, high-cost nuclear power and oil, even though we are an oil-rich economy for perhaps two decades — oil which the Japanese have decided as a matter of policy to eliminate or to reduce as fast as they can?

In this important debate on the Queen's Speech, we discuss many topics, but sometimes I think that we need the benefit of an office of technology assessment which can make this kind of information available to back up our policy in these very complex areas of technology. If such a proposal is made in due course, I hope that it will receive the support of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House.

7.35 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Whereas all Government supporters who have spoken so far have joined the Secretary of State for Employment in saying that unemployment is a difficult and deep-seated problem, I notice that none of them thought the measures that were announced today significant enough to say that they would bring down the level of unemployment.

If the Secretary of State is so concerned about getting unemployment down and his was the first of many measures that he would be announcing, why is it that in the Chancellor's autumn statement the budget of the Secretary of State for Employment is cut from £3·25 billion to £3·18 billion? Why, of the £100 million in total cuts announced today, is the Department of Employment having to bear £70 million? Why is there to be a cut in real terms, as I calculated from today's statement, in the budget of the Department of Employment next year over last year of nearly 4 per cent?

We are debating the Government's economic failure. We are debating their failure to get the economy moving. People are not unemployed because they do not want to work. They are unemployed because the Government have failed. Those whom the Government have made unemployed are being asked to pay the price and to take the blame for that failure.

The Government's failure is not just that for the first time in our industrial history we are importing more manufactured goods than we are exporting. It is not just that we are sending more money abroad than we are investing in our manufacturing industries. The Government's failure is that in vast areas of the country, Scotland being one of them, there are now more men and women without regular jobs than there are employed in manufacturing industry. More people are producing nothing than there are people producing goods of any description.

The Government say that they are creating real and lasting jobs and jobs in new areas and in new industries. The truth is that they have been creating real and lasting unemployment, and unemployment in new areas and, unbelievably, in new industries. They insist that the old industries must be sacrificed for the new. The reality is that our new industries are already being sacrificed to imports.

If that were not the case, why is it that in the high-tech, modern industry of computers, imports now exceed exports by £1 billion? Why is it that in information technology, according to the National Economic Development Council, we are at Third world level in status? Why is it that the trade deficit in data processing —another modern industry and another success story— is now £1 billion? Why is the trade deficit in electronics and telecommunications now approaching £2 billion? Why in that whole sector have we suffered a loss of 200,000 jobs over the past five years?

Oil was to be the great success story. The petrochemicals industry was to expand. Why is it that 59

per cent. of our oil is exported to be processed abroad instead of being developed and providing jobs here? Why is it that our trade deficit in oil-based plastic jobs is now running at £500 million, which is one third higher than it was in 1979, when we are self-sufficient and gaining the most benefit from oil? Our oil industry was to have been the harbinger of the British economic miracle. It is now a damning catalogue of waste and missed opportunities.

As the CBI confirmed last week, the Government are killing off the new industries as brutally and as negligently as they have killed off the old ones.

For all the Government's talk of real jobs, they know that we are still losing manufacturing jobs at the rate of 5,000 every month—at a faster rate over a longer period than our competitors. In 1979 there were more than 7 million manufacturing jobs. Now there are only about 5 million. How many more manufacturing jobs in productive industries have to be lost before the Government finally leave office?

The truth is that over the past year the Government have not created one extra full-time job in Britain, with the exception, perhaps, of the appointment of a Minister Without Portfolio. When the Japanese are training 10 times as many workers as we are, which is one big significant difference the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Lloyd) might have pointed out, when the French are sponsoring tomorrow's technologies and guaranteeing every person under 25 a job, when Germany is training 40 times as many adults as we are, when America is reflating and has reflated the economy in its fight against the evil of unemployment, the best that Britain can be offered under monetarism is a Minister Without Portfolio whose sole job is to minimise the Government's embarrassment at continually rising unemployment. He is a Minister Without Portfolio who is also a Minister without powers, policies, or a programme and without the faintest possibility of anything other than a few pounds to spend.

What is that Minister doing in his new post? It is not real work. It carries no real responsibility. There is not even a salary, only an allowance. He will not learn anything, because he will not have anything to do, and at the end of the year or so he will be completely expendable. The man who, as chairman of the Manpower Services Commission, sent thousands of young people on cosmetic and meaningless short-term schemes of pseudo-employment has now been sent by the Prime Minister on one of his own.

After five years of suffering to no point or purpose, with no prospect of recovery, all that we have from the Government, as we heard today from the Secretary of State for Employment, are empty gestures born of discredited policies of a failed Administration pursuing a bankrupt ideological solution that cannot and will not work. The recession will last until doomsday if the Minister Without Portfolio is all that confronts it.

The Chancellor, who, successively over four weeks, has been heard in silence by his own party conference, spurned by his friends in the City when he could not, after a speech at the Mansion House, halt the decline in sterling, deserted in only the last few days by his Prime Minister and her Cabinet, has the audacity to assert that the economy is in good shape, healthy, and fundamentally sound and that there is no crisis.

How can there be no crisis when there is desolation in the communities which Ministers refuse to visit and despair in the faces which they never see? How can the Chancellor call an economy healthy when 4 million who want to work in it are producing nothing, when teenagers born in the 1960s, at school in the 1970s, are condemned to the dole queues in the 1980s and beyond? How can he call it healthy when, as has become clear from the statements being made about wage levels in Britain, the Government's highest aspiration for Britain now seems to be to raise us to the level of the low-tech, low-pay economies of Korea and Taiwan, just when those economies are trying to move upwards into higher tech and higher-paid industries?

Five years ago the Government told us that the problems of unemployment and poverty could be solved only by the creation of more wealth for the wealthy. Now, five years later, when the rich have become richer, when profits have been rising to a record high without creating a single new job in the economy, the Government are saying that the problems of unemployment and poverty can now be solved only by the creation of more poverty for the poor.

When our wage levels are about the lowest in Europe, and certainly much lower than in America, when unit labour costs have been falling and are said to be the second lowest in the industrial world, when last year prices rose by 5 per cent. and for the lowest paid workers—women in manual jobs—wages rose by only 3·7 per cent., the Chancellor tells us that the poor must become poorer, that the real problem is not unemployment, but the unemployed. Having, as a matter of policy, made people poor by forcing them out of work, he now says that, even if they find work, they must remain poor. How much poorer have people to become to secure true prosperity for all?

There are women in my constituency whose wages have been halved over the past few years, without the creation of a single job. There are women in manufacturing work in my constituency who are earning only £1·56 an hour, who were told last week that their jobs were to go because the company was refusing to invest in the area. People cannot price themselves into jobs where no jobs exist. We must ask the Government how much poorer they think people have to become, how much spending power must be taken out of the economy, how many more lost producers and lost consumers must there be in Britain before true monetarism arrives?

The Labour party's message is clear. There can be no recovery for Britain without the recovery of those who are unemployed. There can be no prosperity for Britain without the prosperity of those who are now poor. The Government may discard the unemployed and the poor as surplus to their requirements. The truth is that in Britain there is more talent on the breadline than in the board rooms and there is more ability stagnating at the employment exchanges than there is speculating on the Stock Exchange. The country knows what the Government fail to recognise. Only by the activity of those out of work and not their inactivity, only by mobilising the energies of the young and not encouraging their idleness, only by tapping the potential of those who are unemployed and not depending on their passivity can Britain return to full employment and the economy begin to grow again.

7.46 pm

Mr. Charles Morrison (Devizes): The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) asks some pertinent

[Mr. Charles Morrison]

questions to which the Government are duty bound to reply. The hon. Gentleman was strong on criticism but weak on constructive proposals to overcome our problems.

I want to make two quick preliminary remarks. First, it is important to emphasise to the Treasury that the British people are not prepared to put up with any cut in overseas aid. Secondly, this year, the main piece of legislation with which the House will be dealing is the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan counties. It is difficult to comprehend how London will work with no directly elected city-wide authority. However efficient the boroughs and the quangos may be, to expect a city to operate without a city-wide authority is almost certainly to expect the impossible. West of the iron curtain, if the Bill becomes law, London will be the only major city without a city-wide authority. Is every city and Government wrong?

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made an excellent, constructive, sensible speech, understanding of the needs and problems of Britain. Therefore, it is all the more regrettable that he has to answer for unemployment. But I suppose that the Treasury cannot be asked to respond to every debate that we have. However, it might have been pleasant to have had a Treasury Minister on the Front Bench during the debate.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East said that the Government's failure was that in many areas there are more people producing nothing than there are producing something. The Government Front Bench do not need reminding that several of my hon. Friends and I have consistently expressed fears that the Government's economic policy would lead to higher unemployment. We have consistently been told that we were wrong. Consistently and inexorably unemployment has risen. Consistently and regrettably events have proved that the fears that we expressed were correct. As is the way in politics, we have consistently made ourselves unpopular as a result.

The Queen's Speech states:

"my Government remains deeply concerned about unemployment and will continue policies designed to achieve better opportunities for employment".

The trouble is that existing policies are not reducing unemployment, and I feel that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has too strong a belief in his own theories and policies. The result is that he has been consistently over-optimistic about their consequences. If only he would adopt a little more scepticism, it might breed a little more flexibility and a little more ability to listen to the ideas of others or, even more radically, to adopt some of those ideas.

Plenty of ideas are floated from the Left, Right and Centre of the Conservative party. Not all sections of the party will agree on all the ideas, but there is much common ground. It is no use Ministers saying repetitively that all other policies have failed and that, therefore, there is no alternative. That is simply not so. On some counts at least, earlier policies were more successful. Even if it were true that there is no alternative—which I do not accept—people will not believe that if the Government's policy does not produce the desired or forecast results.

I believe that a successful economy requires low inflation, a healthy balance of payments, a reasonable level of economic growth and full employment. As the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) said, no one should detract from the Government's achievement in lowering inflation to 4·7 per cent. The Government must be given the fullest credit for that. It was a difficult and painful task.

Outwardly, the balance of payments looks adequate, but on closer analysis it does not look so rosy because our balance of trade on current account has steadily deteriorated from a £7·2 billion surplus in 1981 to a surplus of only about £1 billion this year. Mr. Scargill must take some of the blame, but there are other reasons.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Hordern) pointed out in the *Daily Telegraph* last week, production in some of our basic industries ran down by at least 20 per cent. between 1979 and 1983. In category after category of product, imports have grown as a proportion of home sales.

Overall, our imports of manufactures increased by 34 per cent. between 1981 and the first half of 1984, whereas our output of manufactures increased by only 4 per cent. The result is terrifying. A nominal trade surplus of £5 billion five years ago has turned into a £7 billion non-oil trade deficit this year.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My hon. Friend has drawn attention to our propensity to import. Should not that propensity make us wary of treating cuts in direct taxation as the major instrument for reducing unemployment?

Mr. Morrison: I shall be coming to that point.

The huge change from a surplus to a deficit is bound to have had a considerable effect on jobs. It is no use pretending otherwise. The Government claim that what has happened is due to industry being uncompetitive and wages being too high. However, the Government indirectly take credit for improvements in productivity. In any case, wages are only one factor, and there are many others. When the Government first came to office sterling was overvalued. It is important to note that, although investment has improved and is improving, in the first half of this year it was still 26 per cent. below the level of 1979.

It is also important for the Government to listen to the opinions of individual industries. The chemical industry has a substantial balance of trade in favour of the United Kingdom, but that is deteriorating and the industry believes that it will continue to do so unless our Government match the support given by Governments elsewhere, especially in Europe.

The same is true for special steel and alloy production. Not long ago, employment in that sector totalled 18,000. Today, it is below 2,000. The reason is that companies doing similar work in countries such as France, West Germany and Sweden have been heavily subsidised and have undercut British companies. The situation is not the fault of this Government alone, but what has occurred should provide the Government with food for thought and, perhaps, action, particularly as our strategic interests are at risk in that sector.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East mentioned electronics. Our deficit in that sector has increased almost fivefold in the past five years. Perhaps the industry should be doing better of its own volition, but at the CBI conference warnings were given, once again, about the consequences for that industry of cuts in public expenditure which could reduce money for science and innovation.

Three points should be noted from all this. First, belief in a market economy is all very well as long as every other country has the same belief. However, as, in practice, none does, our industry will be at a disadvantage unless it is assisted to the same extent as industry elsewhere. It is no use pretending that company A in this country can compete against company B and its Government in another country. It cannot be done.

Secondly, although money for assistance is limited, there is at least a chance that some of what is available could be better used. My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham made that point.

Thirdly, if the performance and prospects for manufacturing industry can be improved, not only will the balance of trade improve, but more jobs will become available. Probably there should be more intervention by Government—not on the basis of poking their nose in where it is not wanted, but on the basis of responding to requests and developing a better partnership with industry, as exists in some of our competitor countries.

The Government must also act directly to create more jobs. I welcome today's announcement of the expansion of the enterprise allowance scheme, but enough time has passed to demonstrate that low inflation alone will not create jobs and nor will cuts in public expenditure.

Indeed—I pick up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) in his intervention—my heart sinks every time I hear a Minister say that there must be cuts in public expenditure to make room for cuts in taxation. I can speak only for my area of the country, but not only is there little or no demand for cuts in taxation and not only do many people believe that cuts in public expenditure equal cuts in employment, but if there has to be a choice most of my constituents would choose to retain current levels of expenditure, both to maintain levels of public provision and services and to maintain or, better still, to improve employment levels.

The Government should be in no doubt that the understandable demand for cuts made in 1979 has largely disappeared. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has said that the problem is not lack of demand. I suspect that that is not an opinion that would be shared by the unemployed, least of all by those in the construction industry.

Mr. Gerald Howarth *rose*——

Mr. Morrison: I should prefer not to give way as I have gone on for long enough.

That is why I say yet again that the Government must initiate a much bigger programme of capital expenditure on necessary infrastructure work. If that involves a somewhat larger PSBR, so be it. This afternoon, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor took pride in the fact that next year the PSBR would be the lowest for a decade as a proportion of gross domestic product. In present circumstances I do not believe that that pride is justified.

Capital investment alone will not be enough. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor should also act on some of the suggestions put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) and the One Nation group of Tory Members of Parliament, or explain why he cannot do so. Some excellent suggestions have been made, but there has been no response to them. Not all of the suggestions may be practical, but surely some are. My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham mentioned national insurance contributions and I agreed with him. It is essential that we should make employing people less unattractive and less expensive. It is also very important to remove the disincentives to part-time work which exist in the benefit system and to take action to encourage part-time or whole-time voluntary retirement.

The need for more training has already been stressed so I shall not re-emphasise it, although I was glad to note the expansion of training that has been announced. If the Government took action along the lines that many hon. Members are suggesting, by the end of this Parliament they would be able to boast not only of their success in controlling inflation but also of their success in improving our balance of trade and, therefore, our balance of payments, in increasing the rate of economic growth and in cutting unemployment substantially. If they carry on as they are, I fear that the electorate will conclude that their list of achievements and successes looks a little thin.

8.2 pm

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): I hope that the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison) will forgive me if, in the interests of brevity, I do not respond directly to his speech. However, I agreed with almost everything that he said, and that will become obvious from my short contribution.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) graphically drew our attention to the two most alarming factors about the industrial scene. First, almost all of our surviving manufacturing industry is in a state of deep depression. Whatever glib words may come from Ministers, that is the harsh reality. The second, and perhaps even more alarming factor, is that Ministers are not worried about it and do not care. Consequently, they do not feel that they have any obligation or, indeed, motive to provide the same support and encouragement for British manufacturers as the Governments of West Germany, Italy, France, the United States and Japan give to their manufacturers. That is the biggest problem facing us. In response to what the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) said, I should emphasise that I am making a plea not for protectionism but for enlightened self-interest.

We live in a hard world, and our Government should adopt the same attitude towards those industries as nearly all the other developed countries adopt. In one sense, perhaps, I am making a plea for a little Gaullism in this country. The sort of cosmetic measures mentioned by the Secretary of State for Employment are no substitute for the development of an economic policy that will create the environment in which manufacturing industries can grow and flourish. I appreciate the very limited importance of such measures. Of course it is helpful if one can assist people to set up in business, but it is no use at all if there is no market for their products. When people are setting up enterprise zones, giving out money and excusing businesses from rates, that tends to be forgotten. In the long run those businesses must be able to sell what they produce if they are to stay in business. At present, that is not happening.

There is a declining market for almost every type of product. Earlier this year the Trade and Industry Committee made a detailed inquiry into the quite appalling imbalance of trade in manufactured goods as between this country and the remainder of the EC, including the prospective members, Spain and Portugal. Lest any hon. Member has forgotten just how bad it is, I should point out

[Mr. Stan Crowther]

that in 1983 the balance against this country was more than £8 billion. That is not marginal, but represents a ratio of 3:2 against us in trade in manufactures with a part of the world with which we do 40 per cent. of all our overseas trade. Therefore, it seemed quite a serious matter to us. We all deeply regret the enforced absence of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, but in evidence to the Committee he said:

"What is important above all is our overall balance of trade not merely with the Community, not merely in manufactures, but with the world in all respects. Now, of course, it is to be regretted inevitably whenever we fall into a deficit in any commodity with any part of the world in one way, but it should not be regarded as overwhelmingly tragic provided we have a surplus in other commodities with other parts of the world."

Hon. Members will find that quotation in paragraph 31 of the report. Given that we are talking about a part of the world with which we do 40 per cent. of our trade and about manufactured goods which represent 70 to 80 per cent. of all our exports, the Committee did not go much for that attitude, and unanimously said:

"We consider this attitude to be both complacent and shortsighted."

Indeed, it is. The Committee said:

"Our current account is in surplus due to the sales of oil and gas, which some consider will decline over the next 10-20 years. It is imperative for the Government to look to the longer term in deciding to what extent the continued decline in manufacturing should be permitted to continue . . . we recommend that the Government takes urgent action to prevent the further decline of the UK's manufacturing base."

In other words, we asked the question that many people ask today—what will this country live on when the oil runs out, if our manufacturing industries have gone? We have had the Government's reply to that report, but there is not even a glimmer of an answer to that question. They say:

"The Government is not complacent about the challenges facing manufacturing industry".

But the Government's reply is riddled with complacency, and to say that they are not complacent does not really help. Much of the problem is due to the alarming rise in imports in recent years. In relation to the rest of the world our position is not quite as bad as it is with the Community. Our trade deficit in manufacturers with the whole world last year was over £5 billion. Because I wish to be brief I shall not list all industries and their import penetration levels, but the figures make sombre reading.

The Secretary of State referred to the motor car industry. We should be worried about the fact that 57 per cent. of all the motor cars bought in the United Kingdom are imported when only 10 years ago the figure was 27 per cent. That is a fantastic increase. That change has led to the loss of a huge number of employment opportunities, not only in the car industry but in all the industries which supply it.

Much damage has been done to the steel industry, in which I have a particular consitutency interest, and to the rubber, plastics and glass industries, all of which are losing jobs because of imported motor cars.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I too am concerned about the motor industry, but is not the decline in support for the British motor industry caused by the British public's rejection of those motor cars? Should not the British motor industry be more competitive? Should not the hon. Gentleman advocate the immediate return to work of the Austin Rover men?

Mr. Crowther: I do not wish to discuss the dispute at British Leyland. It does not have much to do with the number of imported cars. An act of God did not create the enormous increase in imports but an act of Ford Motors and General Motors. The Government should take that up. Huge numbers of motor cars are being imported. It is disgraceful that Ford, a company which has received so much Government assistance, should have been directly responsible for £750 million worth of our adverse trade balance last year. It is time that Ministers had a quiet word in the ear of Sam Toy, the leading light at Ford, and said that it is time that he started exporting motor cars from Britain instead of importing cars from elsewhere. Multinational companies which have been helped to settle here should be required to do something for the British economy.

The sorry tale of decline and collapse is repeated in industry after industry. Whose fault is it that the policies, unswervingly adhered to by the Government for the last five and a half years, have so spectacularly failed to produce the promised results? Is it the fault of the workers, the managers, the public or the trade unions? It never seems to be the Government's fault. They never admit that their policies have gone wrong and that it is time to put them right.

One of the problems is the fact that the close interdependence between the manufacturing industry and the construction and transport industries is so dimly perceived, if it is perceived at all, by Ministers. Anyone with half an eye can see that an upturn in one industry will create employment opportunities in another, just as a cut in one will depress them all.

Only a Government with a genius for ignoring the obvious could keep 450,000 construction workers on the dole while more than 2 million people are waiting for houses to be built. How can anyone with a sense of logic justify that? Lewis Carroll in his wildest dreams could not have produced such a wonderland.

The Government's obsessive hatred of the public sector and public expenditure, demonstrated once again by the Chancellor earlier today, is at the heart of many industrial problems. Everyone outside the Government, including many Conservatives, understand that capital expenditure within the public sector is needed to prime the pump. That is understood by organisations such as the CBI and the Building Employers Confederation which write to us about it every week.

It is a pity that Ministers cannot grasp the fact that almost every penny spent by a local council on a housing contract goes straight into the private sector. The artificial distinction between public and private is nonsense. Such expenditure does not merely assist the building industry, but it provides work for all the industries that supply the building industry. When the houses are built work is created for industries producing furniture, carpets, curtains, and all the other products for the home. A starter is needed and that can come only from public capital expenditure.

Every time the Government cut public expenditure they hit directly the private sector industries which they are supposed to champion. I wonder how much longer private sector industrialists will continue to support a Government who have so miserably failed to look after their interests and who have put many thousands of them out of business. Until there is a dramatic change in Government policy, I

fear that no improvements will take place. Tragically, once again today we heard nothing to make us believe that the Government even begin to understand the problem.

8.17 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I assure the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) that there is no complacency on this side of the House about the scale of unemployment. It remains the most intractable problem which the present Government have to face. About 263,000 jobs were created in the year up to March 1984, but the unemployment figure has remained at about 3 million because the number of people entering employment is greater than the number coming off the employment list for retirement. It is estimated that, just to cope over the next five years with the extra people coming on to the labour market, another 500,000 new jobs are required. That is the scale of the probem. Because the problem is large, it does not mean that the Government do not care.

The other day I visited the headquarters of the Newark district council's programme for the youth training scheme in my constituency and saw it in operation. It was impressed upon me that the training offered by the youth training scheme is sometimes not long enough. The hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) mentioned that. In some cases the scheme should be extended to two years, or at least young people should be able to come off YTS and go straight on to the community programme without having to complete the qualifying period, during which they are unemployed. We have heard a great deal about training and more training, and that may be a partial answer to the problems facing the young unemployed today.

I sometimes wish that people and politicians of all sorts would speak less about workers pricing themselves into jobs and less about workers taking cuts in their wages. There may be some merit in that theory, but it is always the other man—not me, not us—who has to take the cut. It is always someone else who must solve the problem.

I wish that Ministers would be more realistic in considering ideas fed to them. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart), in the oft quoted pamphlet "Jobs Ahead", has provided several worthwhile ideas. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison) has often said, there has been little response either for or against any of those ideas.

What work is being carried out in the Department of Employment to monitor the effectiveness of wages councils, especially as they affect youngsters? They squeeze youngsters out of jobs when an employer is trading on a very thin margin. It would be an enormous step forward in creating employment opportunities for youngsters if the artificial restrictions and bureaucratic nonsense that often accompany wages councils' awards were swept away.

Why should academics on those councils know best the rates for youngsters or how businesses can trade profitably and yet pay extremely high wages to youngsters? Why is it that pamphlets for the employer are often couched in such threatening and hostile terms? Pamphlets on redundancy payments, maternity benefits and so on are riddled with threats of fines and penalties for non-compliance. There is rarely a word of comfort, advice or help for the employer. There is rarely a mention of his rights, but perhaps he has none. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to accept that, while we make fine noises about encouraging the entrepreneur, we should not have the mailed fist and threaten them with pamphlets from the Civil Service.

I urge my hon. Friend to consider some of the anomalies surrounding the young workers scheme. The Department of Employment pamphlet, in its description of the scheme, states that it is

"designed to encourage employers to employ more young people in full time and permanent jobs at rates of pay which reflect their age and relative inexperience."

Subject to certain conditions, an employer can claim £15 a week for a maximum of 52 weeks for an employee whose gross average earnings are £50 a week or less. Yet the retail, non-foods wages council—working in its ivory tower—says that the minimum rates for young workers should be £50·05 a week. That is denying youngsters the possibility of taking advantage of the scheme. The wages councils are out of touch with reality.

I have written to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary about the example that I have cited. He has said in writing that that wages council knew of the £50 limit on the young workers scheme when it fixed the minimum rate at 5p above elegibility for participation. While the law makes nonsense of common sense, people will find ways around it. Even wages inspectors will informally advise employers that if they can get the young person to put in writing that he or she is not available for work for more than 36 hours a week, the payment can be made—otherwise, employers are liable for a large fine. It is another example of politicians and Ministers saying fine words about helping businesses and helping youngsters find employment, with the civil servants scuppering the whole scheme.

Ministers have no power to overrule awards by a wages council, with the result that the employer is discouraged from employing a young person. Potential employees, therefore, remain in the dole queue. It is an example of the Government being so hedged about by bureaucracy that often the schemes are of no use to those for whom they are intended. The barrier in the example that I citied is 5p. It would be laughable if it was not so serious for the young people who find themselves excluded from the scheme.

I believe, and the Government always state that they believe, that the future employment of the young lies largely in business, and especially small business. That is the area for job opportunities, especially for girls. A small retailer operating on tight margins told me that a girl had applied for a job. The retailer could just manage £35 a week, but no more. Thanks to the 5p, the Government scheme was of no use to her and she remains on the dole. It was a heartbreaking experience for both of them. It is a disgrace and an example of the pettiness of the restrictions with which the scheme is surrounded.

The small retailer must be supported if we are to encourage further employment. Yet we are actually rarely encouraging the small retailer, the person whose survival daily is a matter of conjecture.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend deal with the difficult point that Britain is a signatory to the International Labour Organisation and that we must give notice soon if we are to withdraw from it? Obviously, international ramifications are involved. Unless the Government begin to mobilise support for getting out of the ILO, it will be too late.

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I welcome his support. On previous occasions I have urged the Government to take a more robust stance and to say, here and now, "We will renegotiate the convention on wages councils; we will have nothing further to do with it."

We should be able better to look after those who are the employers of the future. The young unemployed are looking to us; their noses are pressed against the window. With a little imagination, a little foresight and much more care, we can bring those youngsters in from the cold. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider that most carefully.

8.30 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I disagree profoundly with the comments of the hon. Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) about wages councils, but I share his view that there is a need to encourage those who are involved with small retail businesses. There is a need to do rather more than encourage young people to participate in training schemes that all too often lead to long-term employment. I share the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for the argument of the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison). To regard tax cuts as being the alpha and omega of economic policy is nonsensical and we need to do rather more than pursue the bland monetarism on which the Government have embarked over the past five years.

The Secretary of State told us at the outset of the debate that he would extend the number of youth training schemes. The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Lloyd) quoted Keynes during his contribution, echoing a comment that was made by the Leader of the Opposition when he responded to the Gracious Speech. It is appropriate to recall that Keynes participated in the 1929 Liberal inquiry into Britain's industrial future. It was maintained at that time—those concerned were right to do so and I am sure that their belief is relevant now—that the only way to create new work was by the state playing a positive role. That is something from which the Government have moved away radically. I am sure that we must move back to that belief, and I am sure also that Keynes, as the precursor of Beveridge, would have shared Beveridge's view that there is no purpose in having people digging holes merely to fill them in again. We must give people useful employment in creative work that is geared to the needs of the community, instead of merely providing useless employment.

The hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Hordern) referred to Liverpool and said that all the business in the city was done underneath the arches. He said that he discovered this when he travelled to Liverpool to write an article on unemployment. He admitted that there was little unemployment in his constituency. I took exception to his remark about all the trade in Liverpool being carried out underneath the arches. There are many successful businesses in Liverpool. Sometimes we are plagued by unnecessary militancy—and there are those who wish to use local commerce and the local authority as a stalking horse against Government policies. Confrontation will never be the way of solving the city's problems or those of local industry. However, it betrays an ignorance of the city to suggest that the black economy is all that there is in Liverpool. There are many successful businesses and the overwhelming majority conduct their affairs in an orderly way.

The Secretary of State's remarks at the commencement of the debate on the massive growth of unemployment revealed appalling complacency. No one would think, from his approach, that one person has become unemployed for every minute of every day since the Government were first elected, or that one fifth of manufacturing industry has disappeared since 1979. All the signs are that things will become worse.

Recent studies suggest that unemployment will continue to rise from the 3·1 million which the Government admit to about 3·5 million next year, and possibly 3·7 million by 1990. The justification for high unemployment—lower inflation—will look sick if the predictions of my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Wainwright) are right and inflation increases to the anticipated level of 7 per cent. Similarly, economic growth during 1986-88 will not exceed the sluggish rate of 1·5 per cent. That, too, will be disastrous for jobs.

The Government have succeeded in reversing one trend that was consistent during post-war years. The trend of greater income equality stopped in 1979 and since then there has been a new trend towards greater income inequality. The richest 1 per cent. of the population own about 21 per cent. of the nation's wealth and the poorest half of the population own only 4 per cent. of the nation's wealth. We Liberals believe that that wealth should be more evenly distributed, especially through profit sharing and co-ownership schemes. We believe also that work should be more evenly spread.

Unemployment is probably the gravest of our social maladies. Its deplorable results are ignored by politicians at their peril. Unemployment is high in all areas, but there are concentrated pockets of rampant unemployment in the north-west, the north, the west midlands and Wales. Unemployment is higher than 15 per cent. in those areas. In 10 of the metropolitan areas unemployment rates are over 22 per cent.—more than twice the rate that is found in more prosperous areas. A census that was carried out in the constituencies, the results of which were published last year, revealed that nearly 300 constituencies—they were predominantly in the south and were like the constituency that is represented by the hon. Member for Havant—had single-figure unemployment. However, in parts of my constituency unemployment is as high as 45 per cent. People in the north of England bitterly resent the ostentatious luxury of the affluent areas of employment in Britain. The jangling discords of our nation have made Britain a divided kingdom, not a United Kingdom.

Unemployment divides and it disaffects as well. Unemployment means having to do, and that can mean having to do with the rest of us in society. The unemployed form a ready-made breeding ground for the political revolutionary, the heroin pusher and the criminal fraternity. That is all too plain to see in a city such as Liverpool, where 104,000 — 20 per cent. of the population — are condemned to the dole. Of those 104,000, 16,000 are school leavers or students leaving higher education. Many feel the futility and desperation of being the best-educated youngsters on the dole queue.

The Government cannot argue that unemployment is a short-term phenomenon without hardship. About 63 per cent. of the unemployed have been without jobs for longer than six months and 42 per cent. have been out of work for more than a year. Official job vacancies represented almost 20 per cent. of the unemployed in 1979, but they now represent only 5 per cent. Even if the Government

claim that job vacancies are three times the official count, 85 per cent. of those who are unemployed are condemned to long-term unemployment. Many of them have little or no hope of ever finding a job. Some youngsters in Liverpool have told me that they believe that they face 50 years on the dole queue.

An examination of the age composition of the unemployed reveals that young people are especially badly hit. The House should reflect on the fact that 1·2 million of those who are out of work are young. Young people aged 24 years or less represent 39 per cent. of Britain's official unemployed. That means wasted talent, wasted productivity and, most importantly, wasted people. Next year will be International Youth Year. It will be a year when four out of 10 of the unemployed are under 25 years of age, when the rate of unemployment for those under 25 years is 21 per cent., and 10·3 per cent. for those over 25.

As the Minister has admitted, there are 350,000 people on youth training schemes. Although I am glad that the Government are doing more to try to make the schemes more relevant, many of the schemes do not lead to a job. I repeat the point that I made to the Secretary of State in an intervention. Youth Aid claims that about 116,000 trainees will leave the schemes this year without the chance of finding work. I hope that the Government will deal with that rather more comprehensively than the Secretary of State did earlier.

If the Government stand behind their claim that the dole and other subsidies turn people into social parasites, they are condemning generations of young people who are entering the work force to such a fate. The social consequences are enormous. New crime figures show that six crimes are committed every minute. On Merseyside, over 111,000 crimes have already been committed this year. Burglaries have increased by 12 per cent. and muggings by 33 per cent. Juvenile offences have doubled in the past 20 years and more than half of all offences are committed by those under 21, yet we continue to hear from the Treasury Bench that unemployment and crime are unrelated. The Government insist that one cannot possibly have anything to do with the other.

Criminals entice the unemployed, but there are others, including militant agitators and malcontents. These elements are stirring up unrest and violence. Violence cannot be permitted to threaten the well-being of the many. Those who lead others to burn, loot, intimidate or riot must feel the full force of the law. However, we should not delude ourselves by believing that punishment is prevention. History offers cold comfort to those who think that grievance and despair can be met with force. Effective law enforcement is only a beginning. The Government must learn to listen and respond. They must not pretend that the problems that face the nation are illusory. By denying the existence of serious problems which constitute a menacing challenge to the stability of our society they are merely immersing themselves in a fantasy world.

The reality is that 16 million British people are living below the margin of poverty, and some 500,000 people are living in homes with no inside toilet, running hot water or bathroom. Dreary estates, substandard homes, massive heroin addiction, racial tensions and lack of education are realities, as are frustrated expectations and disappointed hopes. Some 3 million people, many of them young, are unemployed and on the dole queue. We can either face those realities with imagination and wisdom, or we can summon the forces of the market place, where only the strong survive. I sometimes think that the Government's philosophy is, "Do unto others before they do you."

We are encouraging people to be greedier and we are encouraging a society in which only the strongest can survive. Instead of cutting the taxes of the strongest, we should be creating more work for the weak, the vulnerable and those at risk. £1 billion of Government spending invested in a capital programme could create 165,000 new jobs, but the Government would rather give it away to a tiny minority in tax cuts.

On Merseyside, more than enough work needs to be done to make an immediate and massive impact on unemployment, and the same is true all over the country. There are roads, parks, houses and derelict land, all of which are in need of improvement. The infrastructure is crumbling beneath us, but imaginative new projects are needed as well. The hon. Member for Havant spoke of the need to embark on nuclear energy programmes. I can give the House an example of how we can avoid the need to build fast breeder reactors. If we were to construct a barrage across the mouth of the Mersey, not only would we create a source for one third of the electricity requirements of Merseyside, but we would provide 5,000 construction jobs immediately, a new river crossing, new deep-sea water facitities at the mouth of the Mersey for ocean-going container ships and, by impounding the Mersey basin, we could create massive, new recreational resources as well.

Do not let people tell us that this cannot be done. It has been done. It has been done at Murmansk and at San Malo on the le Rance estuary. At San Malo last year, more than 300,000 people visited the barrage that has been built there. That is spending with a purpose, and spending creatively.

We could also set up a new tourist authority to encourage people to come to Merseyside, not to see the desolation about which we heard earlier. It might correct the ignorance which we hear so often from the south. People might see the beauty of the Peak District, the Lake District and north Wales, and the surrounding countryside. They could also see the great buildings and assets of Liverpool and all the good things which our Victorian forefathers, when they wisely invested in the infrastructure of our city, bequeathed to Liverpool.

There is a role for an expanding entertainments industry in the north-west. I should like Merseyside to have its own television station. The most successful English television company servicing Channel 4 is a Merseyside television company producing "Brookside", a soap opera. Hon. Members may laugh, but that company, by showing innovation and initiative, has provided over 120 jobs in an area with massive unemployment. There is room for the natural talent of areas such as Merseyside to be harnessed. We have plenty of musicians, playwrights, comedians and actors. We have many people who could make a contribution if the local television industry were given a chance to expand.

All that is required to help Merseyside is some will and some imagination. My party is disappointed that the Queen's Speech lacks any imagination. It does not seek to reverse any of the Government's policies, nor to remove confrontation from the work place. It fails to address itself to the continuing deindustrialisation of Britain and its consequences. For all these reasons, the Liberal party will vote against the Government tonight.

8.44 pm

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): It is a pity that the Treasury, which has more Ministers than the Navy has admirals, could not have spared one Minister to sit through this important debate on industry and employment, because the Treasury affects so many policies. I am sure that one or two Treasury Ministers will be here tomorrow to put the Treasury case, but in the end industry and trade bring the wealth that the Treasury sets about taxing.

I thought it regrettable that what the Bank of England and the Treasury could not do by persuasion — get people to accept the pound coin—the Treasury will now do by force. There is no doubt that 90 per cent. of the people do not want the pound coin, and I agree with them. It is to be regretted that my Government will make the pound into what is called loose change. What next? In America, where they have the mighty dollar, they have a dollar bill that is only 50p in our language. Why do we have to do away with the pound note simply because it is supposed to cost £3 million a year to print? That is a bad thing.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South) *rose*——

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: I shall not give way. Some of us have been sitting here for six hours and have not come in just five minutes ago, and it would not be fair to give way.

If it is so that the electricity, gas and water industries are not asking for price increases, one is bound to look upon any increase as indirect taxation. In the city of Birmingham, whether we are speaking of industry or people, more people need heat, need to cook and to use water than need anything else. Therefore, an unnecessary price rise is indirect taxation that they can never avoid. I should be much happier if we thought of ways to reduce such taxation than thinking that a further 1p off the standard rate of tax will do anything except for a few people.

I come now to a matter to which all hon. Members who represent cities such as Birmingham, Bristol or Liverpool have persistently referred — the problems of the manufacturing areas. Too often people tell us about the sunrise industries, and talk about silicon valleys, but nearly all of these new industries are being built on virgin green belt land. The problem with that is twofold. First, one does away with much green belt land that we should be keeping, and, secondly, we waste a great deal of the resources that already exist in manufacturing areas, which could be turned to advantage.

As I understand the figures, the problem is clear. For every acre developed for industry in rural areas, five to 10 acres are required for housing and support services. This happens while cities such as Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool are in a state of decay. What Governments should do, but progressive Governments have not done properly, is to try as much as possible to encourage the new and modern industries to go to those areas where they are particularly needed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Hordern) put forward a good case. There has to be some great encouragement to get a developer to develop land in which he may find that he has drains about which no one has heard, and lots of cellars. The cost of developing land in the older cities is vastly more expensive than taking a green field and plonking a factory on it. I hope that, as time goes on, the Government will increasingly give encouragement to inner city development. This is not just charity. The history of our industry seems to have changed, and perhaps for good, and a manufacturing city such as Birmingham has no assisted aid. Yet the figures show that, next to Northern Ireland, Birmingham has the highest number of people who are unemployed for more than 12 months.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Thanks to the Tory Government.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: No, it is not. There is a misunderstanding that all that has happened to manufacturing industry is the Government's fault. It has happened because of changes in fashion. As I said to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) this afternoon, if unions will insist on 20 per cent. wage increases in an industry that is still making a loss, is it surprising that the motor industry in Birmingham is unprofitable?

The Department of the Environment should not be so ready to give planning permission to build in green belt areas. It should be much more willing to help cities such as Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool to modernise their facilities. Above all, the inner city developments that have been carried out by successive Governments should be extended. If given the choice between reducing taxes and using the money to help the inner cities and to make cities such as Birmingham more desirable so that they can prosper, Birmingham people would opt every time for the money to be spent so that Birmingham can be brought up to date, its industry modernised, and so that it can be as good an area in which to live as any other part of the country.

8.51 pm

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): Today the Government have thrown out two crumbs by way of prospects for reducing unemployment. One has been the much-repeated statement by the Chancellor that he expects jobs in the service industries to increase, and he claims that there has already been a growth in jobs of about 243,000 during the past year. As the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison) said, the Chancellor does not consider his own statements with sufficient scepticism. About 165,000 of those jobs are either part-time or jobs for women.

The Chancellor should reflect on recent history. Since 1979, the growth of employment in service industries has been 0·4 per cent.—a lower rate of growth than that achieved under the Labour Government, which was 1 per cent. Indeed, if the Chancellor chose to make comparisons, he would discover that that is the second lowest rate of growth in service industry jobs in the OECD countries. We beat Spain by a whisker. That has happened because of the Chancellor's failure to recognise that jobs in service industries — catering, cleaning, business services, banking and finance — depend upon a flourishing manufacturing sector. As that sector declines, so the possibility of growth in the service industries disappears.

Another crumb, this time from the Secretary of State for Employment, was the allocation of more money to the enterprise allowance scheme to create new companies. However, the effectiveness of such a concession in terms

of the Government's overall economic policy can be judged by what has happened since 1979. There have been more than 86,000 insolvencies; the current rate of bankruptcies is 162 a week; and the total rate of insolvencies during that period was 65 a day. More than a little money for enterprise allowances will be needed to put that right. Jobs and companies are disappearing apace, and the Government's economic policy will have to be reoriented if that is to be rectified.

Perhaps it is because of that high rate of insolvencies that the Queen's Speech contained proposals to change the laws governing insolvency. The Government chose to do that rather than to control the City and deal with the extensive fraud there.

To illustrate that point, I shall mention a company called Ravendale Securities, which was featured recently on the "Checkpoint" programme and in *The Observer*. Ravendale is a licensed dealer in shares. On the "Checkpoint" programme, we saw the sad spectacle of a retired disabled man—a Mr. Dunstan—who had bought shares through the company in flagrant breach of the Department of Trade and Industry's rules. He had never approached the company, but was approached by its representative on the telephone and sold shares that turned out to be worthless, although the company concerned was the sister company of Ravendale — London Venture Capital Market — which sounded impressive and formidable to such a man. As a result of coming into contact with the company he has lost his life savings.

The company is further described in *The Observer* business news section; where it becomes clear that Mr. Singh, the owner of Ravendale, had forged transatlantic links with Marsan Securities, two of whose former senior officers were subsequently censured by the Securities Exchange Commission in America. The company placed shares in Video Turf, owners of the rights to a horse race gaming machine. That was attacked because Camseal, Video Turf's parent company, had perturbing associations with individuals connected with the Signal Life and Cavendish Life frauds.

The "Checkpoint" programme showed that Ravendale had connections with one Thomas Quinn, who is involved with a company called Quikcolor. Thomas Quinn is in prison for fraud, and is a lawyer for the Genovese Mafia family in New York. Ravendale's relationships are highly questionable. It carries out sales in breach of the Department's rules, and it is intending to start over-the-counter sales—it wishes to find more people to con. The company is the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry, but it has done nothing, nor does it intend to introduce legislation this year, to control the licensed dealers or to impose proper controls on the City.

Even *The Mail on Sunday* condemned the activities of the Department. It referred to the Department as "these City dodos", and described the dodo as the mythical bird which, as its eyes were in the back of its head, never knew where it was going. The article went on:

> "Not so the Government, the DTI or the Bank of England. Licensed share dealers, for example, are policed by the DTI. Nevertheless investors lost heavily when Norton Warburg, Trentham Securities and Farrington Stead went belly up. No compensation fund there.
>
> Yet in recent weeks these authorities have preached of the need for greater investor protection. From whom? The overworked and understaffed DTI?"

Indeed, the Department is blind. The article continues:

> "The blunt truth is that while rubbing shoulders and sharing confidences with the world's mighty, the Government and its agents in the financial world appear woefully out of touch with the ordinary customer and employee upon whom any business success depends."

The Government are anxious about social security fraud. They are anxious about crime in the streets—and rightly so. Yet they turn a blind eye to expensive fraud in the City, which destroys the savings of many a small investor of whom the Government are allegedly so fond. For those who deal with licensed dealers, no compensation is available when they pay the price for what is lacking in the Department of Trade and Industry.

It is high time that the Department was prepared to examine companies such as Ravendale and made sure that they do not operate at other people's expense. It is high time that the Government brought forward proper legislation to protect investors instead of turning a blind eye to fraudulent dealings in the City.

9 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): This is the sixth Queen's Speech that has been presented by the Government since they were elected in 1979. The 1979 Queen's Speech proudly proclaimed that the Government

> "will give priority to controlling inflation through the pursuit of firm monetary and fiscal policies. By reducing the burden of direct taxation and restricting the claims of the public sector . . . they will start to restore incentives, encourage efficiency and create a climate in which commerce and industry can flourish."

Such policies would

> "lay a secure basis for investment, productivity and increased employment in all parts of the United Kingdom. — [*Official Report*, 15 May 1979; Vol. 967, c. 48.]

Each Queen's Speech since then has reaffirmed that basic belief. Indeed, the Queen's Speech before us today reaffirms the basic monetarist view that the pursuit of a sound money policy will reduce inflation, which is the prime aim of the Government's policy. However, the major change in the speech is that it clearly recognises that unemployment will increase and talks no longer of providing work but simply of providing work experience for the unemployed. The statement today by the Secretary of State for Employment about more so-called training schemes is a reflection of the Government's failure to reduce unemployment. The Queen's Speech is an admission that the reduction of mass unemployment is not an object of Government policy, particularly now that lower inflation has not produced the required growth to reduce the number of jobless. That was reflected in nearly all the speeches today, and particularly powerfully by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and, on the Government Benches, by the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison).

We in the Opposition wholly reject the deplorable view expressed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that Governments can do little to reduce unemployment. We believe that the Government have deliberately created much of the unemployment as a matter of direct Government policy. Today's announced expenditure cuts will increase unemployment. The Government accept that cuts in public expenditure can cause unemployment, yet reject the view that increased public expenditure can increase the number of jobs. Today, the Chancellor said to the House that he intends to reduce income tax by approximately £1,500 million. That statement exposed the choice now faced by the Chancellor. As the London Business School has said, he could invest that £1,500

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million in public expenditure and capital investment and produce 270,000 jobs, or he could give it back in tax cuts, and it is estimated that that would increase the number of jobs by 45,000. As has been said in the debate, if the Government are making unemployment a priority, it is better to invest the money rather than simply give it back in tax cuts. I think that that is readily accepted by the House, and was reflected in the debate.

In a debate on unemployment on 30 October, the Secretary of State for Employment called for an intelligent and constructive debate on unemployment. It is my intention to adopt that approach. However, I am unsure about whether the latest gimmick of appointing Lord Young to deal with employment removes the responsibility from the Secretary of State. In the past fortnight, there have been two debates on employment in which my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), the Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), in a powerful speech, analysed the failure of the Government's economic and industrial policies and put forward the alternative policies of the Labour party for reversing the continuing decline in our industrial base and the increase in unemployment.

In this, my first speech since my appointment, I wish to address my remarks to challenging the Government's claim that increased unemployment is simply a reflection of the world recession which has affected all the developed countries equally. That is just not true. Much of Britain's unemployment has been brought about by Government policy. All the talk about the scourge of unemployment is mere rhetoric to conceal their guilt.

Mr. Nicholls: If unemployment is simply the product of Government policy, does that include the doubling of unemployment between 1974 and 1979 under the Labour Government?

Mr. Prescott: If the hon. Gentleman will wait, I shall substantiate my argument. A major part of the present unemployment in this country is the direct result of Government policy, and it is intended to be so.

Since May 1979 an average of 7,700 people have been thrown on to the dole every week. The official unemployment figure of 3·2 million is 2 million greater than when the Tories took office in 1979. Despite attacks on the Labour Government about the doubling of unemployment in their period of office, which was certainly not a satisfactory state of affairs — *[Interruption.]* It is not a party political point. In contrast to the state of affairs under the Tories, however, there were more people in employment when we left office than when we came to power.

Sir Anthony Grant: One has to go back into history. It is no good just talking about the last Labour Government. The history of mankind in this country has been that every time there is a Labour Government unemployment is higher when they leave office.

Mr. Prescott: According to the figures provided by the Department of Employment and the Library, that is simply not true. In the five years of Labour Government there was an increase of 350,000 people in employment. In five years of Tory Government the number of people employed fell by 1·3 million. That is the scale of the decline in employment. Those are the Department's own figures. I will show them to the hon. Gentleman afterwards. There is no doubt about the record.

So catastrophic has been the effect on the economy that even the wealth-creating manufacturing areas such as the west midlands, which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) was whining about, now have high unemployment. The Government even propose to reduce the money available for regional aid to less in real terms than was paid in 1964 when unemployment was under 500,000. So much for the brave new world of 1979.

Investment, always a barometer of business confidence, has fallen dramatically as unemployment has increased. Production is still below 1979 levels, and for the first time in our history this great industrial nation has had a deficit in manufacturing trade. Is this the new Tory promised land?

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Department of Trade and Industry slipped in a parliamentary written answer today announcing an immediate moratorium on all new projects in information technology? Is that the way to increase investment?

Mr. Prescott: It is a clear example of the Government's behaviour. The Chancellor comes in with all his rhetoric about how we are turning the corner while another Department reduces investment in technology, the very subject about which we have heard so much in this debate. I leave it to the Minister of State to answer that.

The Government's sole obsession has been to reduce inflation. Tragically, however, the fall in inflation has not led to the growth in the economy so glibly predicted in 1979. In fact, for every 1 per cent. fall in the rate of inflation there has been an increase of about 500,000 in the number of people unemployed. That costs the nation more than £10,000 million a year. We are squandering our massive wealth from North sea oil on the enforced idleness of people on the dole. That is the greatest indictment of the Government's economic policies.

The Government do not lack originality in the breadth of their excuses for failing to achieve what they told us we would achieve. They told us that trade union reform would reduce strikes and obstacles to growth. It is apt to recall that the miners are now in their eighth month of strike action and that the Austin Rover motor company, using the law to impose its will, has contributed to discrediting the courts, undermining the official trade union structure and strengthening an unofficial strike. The Opposition warned the Government that that would happen if they introduced such legislation. That is in sharp contrast to the position at Jaguar. The men there have settled their dispute through patient negotiation rather than confrontation.

The Government's current excuse is the international recession. The Secretary of State for Employment said:

"Other countries face the same problems . . . In Spain, Belgium, Holland and Ireland, unemployment is a lot higher than it is here." — [*Official Report*, 30 October 1984; Vol. 65, c. 1242.]

The 1984 report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is an indictment of the Government's policies on employment. It compares how Britain has done under five years of Tory Government with

other OECD countries that have comparable economies. The report clearly exposes the selective use of that survey by the Secretary of State for Employment. Why did he not mention the other 18 OECD countries that have done better in containing the effects of world recession than Britain has? The report reveals the size, scale and length of unemployment as being considerably greater in magnitude in Britain than in other OECD economies.

During the 1970s Britain's unemployment level was equal to the average for OECD countries. I am pleased to see that we agree on that basic fact. In 1979 5 per cent. of the population were unemployed. After five years of Tory Government, Britain's unemployment figure had increased to 13·1 per cent., according to Department of Employment figures, whereas the average for OECD countries rose to 10·3 per cent. If we had secured the average increase in unemployment because of the recession factors that occurred in the 24 other OECD countries, our unemployment figure would be 2·2 million, not 3·2 million. I am pleased that the Secretary of State nods in agreement. The extra 1 million unemployed is, therefore, the direct result of the Government's monetary policies.

The OECD report shows that Britain's public expenditure programmes are different from those in other OECD countries. It makes it clear that the service sector, which the Government have recently discovered, has continued to expand in all countries, including Britain, but that the rate of growth has been reduced solely in Britain because of the Government's public expenditure policies. That is precisely what my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) pointed out.

Britain was the only country to cut the number of people employed in public services, especially in transport and health. The decline in employment in the health services was four times greater in Britain than the average for other OECD countries. The Government's policies have thrown many more thousands on the dole in Britain than have been made unemployed in the rest of Europe.

The Government's privatisation programmes have also contributed directly to job losses. For example, before British Airways was privatised, 25,000 jobs were lost in preparation for privatisation. Last week we heard that thousands of jobs are to be lost in the munitions industry after privatisation, thus adding to the many thousands who are already unemployed as a direct result of the Government's privatisation policies. The same will be true when that other measure in the Queen's Speech — privatisation of the buses—is pursued. The predictions are that unemployment there will run into the thousands.

If we add to those Government policies the further public expenditure cuts that were announced today and the multiplying effects that they will have on the construction and other industries, we can see clearly how the extra 1 million unemployed can be attributed directly to the Government's policies. They cannot be attributable wholly to the world recession. It is Government policy to increase unemployment. The one bright spot in public expenditure has been the initiative of Labour-controlled local authorities to create enterprise boards and employment schemes to develop local economies. They have invested about £100 million to create and sustain 10,000 jobs at a cost of between £2,000 and £4,000 a job — considerably cheaper than those created by the Government. However, the Queen's Speech proposes to reduce the resources and powers available to local authorities to pursue such activities to reduce unemployment.

The latest excuse for high unemployment is that wage rates in Britain are too high. We are told that we are pricing ourselves out of jobs. This self-styled patriotic Government have presided over the collapse of the British merchant shipping fleet, which has lost 600 ships and 30,000 jobs since 1969. Its international competitors are the flag of convenience countries which pay their seamen —Filipinos and Asians—the equivalent of £40 a week. Do the Government really believe that they can save the Merchant Navy by reducing the pay of seamen? The Chancellor has told us that a 1 per cent. reduction in the level of real earnings could produce 200,000 jobs and yet the Government's Treasury model predicts only 36,000 jobs a year with a 3 per cent. real cut in wages. Where is the evidence for the Government's claim?

The Secretary of State's Department has done research which shows that a 6 per cent. cut in manual earnings between 1980 and 1982 was accompanied not by extra jobs but by a loss of 1·75 million jobs. The Secretary of State now suggests that abolition of wages councils could make a significant change to the level of unemployment, as called for by the hon. Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) in what I can only call a deplorable speech. He called for a reduction in the wages of people who are already earning much less than he pays for an evening out and a dinner.

As a former hotel worker, I know about low wages, as do workers in retail shops, laundry workers and hairdressers. My son is working in a hairdressing shop for a wage of £47·50 for a 40-hour week. Is the hon. Member for Newark seriously suggesting that unemployment can be reduced only by further reducing the wages of the lowest paid? Even the London Business School has said that abolition of wages councils will create only 1,600 jobs a year.

When we consider the huge benefits that the wealthy have gained in tax reductions, we are reminded of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition's powerful words: it appears to be the Government's belief that the rich are not rich enough and that the poor are not poor enough. What an indictment of the Government in the 1980s.

Nobody could accuse the Conservative party of having a modern outlook. I was struck by the similarity of the Government's policies to those put to Parliament in the King's Speech of 1928 by the Tory Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. His speech emphasised sound money policy and the fact that wages were too high. It also contained the obligatory mention of concern about the unemployed although the Government were pursuing policies to increase their number.

That Gracious Speech bore a remarkable resemblance to the one before the House today. It said:

> "The situation in the mining areas continues to engage the earnest attention of My Ministers, who are taking energetic steps to promote the success of the scheme of industrial transfer and migration."

Even the phrase "On your bike" is not new. The same speech included the eternal promise to bring

"relief from the burden of rates."

It continued:

> "The proposed changes in local government and in the relations between the Exchequer and Local Authorities are

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measures of far-reaching importance . . . to promote efficiency and economy in local government." — [*Official Report*, 6 November 1928; Vol. 222, c. 8-9.]

What has changed? In the debate on the Loyal Address in 1928 I am proud to note that it was the Labour party spokesman who offered an alternative based on a public expenditure programme to get people back to work— *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State ought to pay attention to what he has described as an intelligent debate and ask himself whether the solutions that he proposes will not have the same effect as those proposed in 1928.

The essential question posed to this Government is whether they accept the argument in the Beveridge report in 1944, much quoted by the Prime Minister but little understood. Is it the proper responsibility of the Government to secure a high and stable level of employment? That is the question constantly asked of this Government, with no response from either the Secretary of State or the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I shall be happy to give way to the Secretary of State if he wishes to answer it now.

Hon. Members: Is it?

Mr. Tom King: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities on behalf of the Opposition. I am sure that he will do me the credit of agreeing that that is precisely the question that I answered at the end of our last debate in response to the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen).

Mr. Prescott: Given that there is no difficulty in answering the question, may I invite the Secretary of State to make the position clear in view of the charge that I make against the Government that they are deliberately pursuing a policy of high unemployment? They are doing that as a matter of policy and not as a consequence of their policies. I again invite the right hon. Gentleman to get to his feet. Will he make it clear whether he and his Government believe that they have a proper responsibility to secure a high and stable level of employment?

Mr. King: I am happy to repudiate completely the charge that it is this Government's policy to maintain a high level of unemployment. If by some strange transformation — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman asked me a question, and I am attempting to reply to it. If by some transformation President Mitterrand or Signor Craxi was able to stand at this Dispatch Box—or, for that matter, Dr. FitzGerald—he, too, would deny it. Both President Mitterrand and Signor Craxi are friends of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) in the Socialist International. Both would deny that it was their policy to achieve a higher level of unemployment. It is not this Government's policy, either.

Mr. Prescott: The House and the country will recognise the indifference of that reply on what is probably the most important political question before the Government. What the Secretary of State has not taken on board and what I have attempted to illustrate to him is that both Signor Craxi and President Mitterrand, who is an intelligent man, would undoubtedly say that depression had affected their economies. But my point is that the average level of unemployment in the OECD countries is 10 per cent. The fact that ours is far higher than it is in any of those countries stems directly from this Government's policy. I do not ask the Government to bring unemployment down to zero, even if that were possible, but to reduce unemployment by the 1 million that they have deliberately created by their policies.

In the 1920s the Tory Governments produced great misery, mass unemployment and a growing disparity between the rich and the poor. In the latter part of the 20th century that has been brought back to us by another Tory Government. They demand, as they did in the 1920s, that the greatest sacrifice should be made by those least able to bear it. They express concern——

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman *rose*——

Mr. Prescott: —about the unemployed while pursuing policies that seek to increase their numbers. It is our charge that much of that mass unemployment, heaped on Britain by the Government, arises directly from their policies. Indeed, it is a deliberate Government policy to create mass unemployment to achieve the same object as in the 1920s —to discipline the labour force and reduce the wage level.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman *rose*——

Mr. Prescott: In 1928 Stanley Baldwin could at least plead ignorance of an alternative way to reduce unemployment. Britain is sick and tired of the Government's catalogue of excuses for the ever-increasing mass unemployment. I accuse the Government not of ignorance but of deliberately pursuing policies with the express aim of increasing unemployment. A Labour Government——

Sir Anthony Grant: As the hon. Gentleman is treating us to a fascinating history lesson, will he move on from 1928 to 1931 to the first Labour Government which had a majority of 29 and tell us what the unemployment figures were under that Government?

Mr. Prescott: Yes. It is fair to say that a Labour Government found themselves with the collapse of the banking system— *[Interruption.]* I am not completely excusing them but I would at least claim that both the Macdonald Government and the Baldwin Government were ignorant of an alternative way of solving the problems. This Government cannot say that after a Labour Government returned Britain to full employment after the war.

A Labour Government will make it a central feature of Government policy to get people back to work. After the war we were the party that proved that full employment was achievable. We shall once again put the idle resources of capital and labour together to increase the wealth so essential to the development of the standard of living of our people.

The Labour party completely rejects the economic policies in the Queen's Speech that promise further unemployment, more misery and more despair and place greater burdens on those least able to bear them. I promise the Government that we shall not let up for one moment in our opposition to the belief that the present level of mass unemployment is inevitable. We shall give hope where there is despair among the unemployed. We shall seek to expose the reason for the scourge of unemployment so deliberately imposed upon our people. We shall emphatically reject the notion that unemployment must be a permanent feature of so many of our people's lives.

Unemployment will be a central issue at the next general election, with an electorate awakened to the Government's indifference to the plight of millions of the British people. They will elect a Labour Government committed to getting people back to work. Therefore, I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote for our amendment in the Lobby tonight.

9.29 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Norman Lamont): Even after that speech by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), I think that it is still my duty to congratulate him on being appointed shadow Secretary of State for Employment. When the hon. Gentleman defeated me in his constituency by a narrow majority of 23,000 in the 1970 election, he made a powerful and outrageous speech after the count; he made the same speech again tonight.

The debate has been about both industry and employment. I shall concentrate on replying to the points made about industry, but anxiety about the shadow of unemployment has inevitably overhung the debate. The background, which the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East sought to cast aside, is that unemployment in western Europe is at its highest level for 30 years. Furthermore, unemployment has been rising inexorably in this country for decades.

Only 10 years ago Peter Jay forecast that this country would face the prospect of unemployment in the low millions for a decade to come. He concluded that we needed radical social reform, radical institutional reform and reform of the trade unions. His solution included the creation of workers' co-operatives and wider share ownership—a point taken up by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) today, when he advocated much wider share ownership as a way of creating a community of interest between the two sides of industry to promote greater harmony and better industrial relations.

I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he sought. We see wider share ownership as part of the solution. He will know that, as a result of the fiscal changes made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, there has been a considerable increase in the number of company share schemes encouraging more people to buy shares and to identify their futures and fortunes with their companies.

As on other occasions when we have discussed unemployment, part of the debate has revolved around different interpretations of the economic policy of the United States. My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Hordern) made it clear that he believed that the United States had succeeded in generating more jobs because its labour market was more resilient and its housing policies encouraged much more mobility.

Those factors are behind the analysis of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who has stressed that the record of the United States in creating more jobs than Europe is a long-standing record which pre-dates the more lax fiscal stance of the United States. About 13 million of the 15 million jobs created in the United States in the past 10 years—while there has been no net increase in Europe—were created during the time when the United States had a tighter fiscal stance. That is why we say that the record of the United States reflects its supply side policies, its enterprise culture, its more flexible labour market and, yes, its more flexible wages.

Another point that has not been emphasised in the debate is that jobs have been created in our economy. About 300,000 jobs were created in the service sector last year. There was a loss of some jobs in manufacturing, but 250,000 jobs were created in our economy at a time when employment in France and West Germany was falling.

Labour Members claim that many of those were part-time jobs. No doubt they will also point out that many were taken by married women returning to the labour market. I caution the House not to turn its face against part-time jobs. One in five of our workers is already in a part-time job. Some of the considerable growth in employment in the United States has comprised part-time work.

I agree with the Opposition in one respect, and that is that it is significant that the new jobs created have not been filled by people on the unemployment register. That may tell us something about the problems that we still have with the poverty and unemployment traps. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer well understands that and is determined to tackle it. That is why in his last Budget he concentrated all his tax reliefs on the bottom end of the scale.

The hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) and my hon. Friends the Members for Horsham and for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) said that to deal with unemployment we must reduce the cost of employment. The hon. Member for Stockton, South referred to the propositions put forward by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) about altering the balance of national insurance contributions and giving relief at the lower end of the scale. Indeed, that point was echoed in some of my hon. Friend's speeches.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has said that the Government will look at those ideas, as they certainly deserve serious consideration. We recognise that we must reduce the cost of employment. Today, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was able to announce that there would be no increase in class 1 flat-rate insurance contributions. Given that in October the national insurance contribution finally went, the total cost to employers of employing the labour force—despite the increase in the labour force—will fall this year in real terms.

It was because we recognised that argument that we abolished the national insurance surcharge. Opposition Members tended to take it for granted that it could easily be swept away, but if it were still levied on labour at the level that existed when the Conservative party came to office it would mean adding 3·5 percentage points, or the equivalent of £3 billion, to the cost of employing people. That is the equivalent of another 12 points on interest rates. That is what the national insurance surcharge cost. When it was first imposed by the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) it was estimated that it destroyed—even then—60,000 to 150,000 jobs. How many jobs has it destroyed since then?

I had less sympathy with the points that were made about the infrastructure. There was reference to the CBI conference and to the CBI's views on infrastructure. The CBI made two points about infrastructure expenditure. First, although the CBI wanted increased expenditure on infrastructure, it wanted it to be financed by extra cuts in public expenditure. Secondly, in so far as it wanted more infrastructure, it was not just for the sake of creating jobs, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye

[Mr. Norman Lamont]

(Mr. Warren) said, in order to make industry more competitive, as infrastructure investment can have economic benefits. We agree with that and we judge infrastructure by whether it will give a return to the economy. But we do not want white elephant infrastructure. Of all people, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East should know that, because his constituency faces the Humber bridge — one of the biggest white elephants of all.

Aggregate capital expenditure in the public sector is at broadly the same levels as in 1978 and 1979. We are planning to spend about £700 million this year even on water and sewerage. I have noticed the calls for greater expenditure, but I have also noticed that the House of Lords Select Committee said that until the whole system was comprehensively surveyed there was a grave risk of misallocation and of wasting money. Private housing starts were at the highest level ever last year. This year, the construction industry's output has gone up by 5·25 per cent.

It is an illusion, with 3 million people unemployed, to think that we can take huge numbers off the unemployment register simply by spending more on infrastructure. The shadow Chancellor suggested that expenditure of £1¼ billion might create 750,000 jobs. First, that does not leave much for the rest of his £2·3 billion package. Secondly, his arithmetic is nonsense. Nothing like that number of jobs would be created. Such expenditure has to be weighed against the jobs that might be destroyed through extra taxes or extra interest rates. Investment is needed, not just in the public sector but in the private sector too. We do not want just a public sector recovery, but recovery of the private sector as well.

Because we have kept expenditure under control, we have brought interest rates down. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) referred to our interest rates as if they were higher than those in other countries. They are not. Our base rate is now 10 per cent., compared with 12½ per cent. in France and 17 per cent. in Italy. Our real rates are lower than in the United States and are not much different from those in Japan. That is a direct result of our policy of controlling public expenditure.

We were accused of being excessively gloomy about unemployment, as though we should manufacture optimism on demand. If people demand better news, they should read the CBI survey on employment published last Monday, in which Sir James Cleminson said that there were more rays of hope about job prospects than for some time. About 30 per cent. of the companies polled expected to employ more people in 12 months time than they do now.

That survey demonstrates an optimism in the medium term for small and medium-sized businesses, and well it might, because no Government in the world have done more to encourage small businesses. In the years from 1980 to 1983, 120,000 new businesses—net births over deaths—were created.

My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham said that our unit wage costs in manufacturing, though rising slowly by historic standards, were rising faster than those of our main competitors, particularly those of Germany and the United States. We do not think that it is for the Government to fix wages—that is for management and the unions—but the Government are entitled to observe that there is a choice between higher wage increases and a lower level of employment, and lower wage settlements and a higher level of employment.

The shadow Chancellor seemed outraged when the Chancellor referred to wages merely holding steady. Anyone would have thought that we were talking about reducing people to rice bowl wages and making them the coolies of Europe. All that the Chancellor said was that if we held wages steady in real terms the economy would create another 500,000 jobs. The shadow Chancellor must agree with that, because he has advocated an incomes policy as one way of solving unemployment. He makes the right analysis, but draws the wrong conclusion.

Hon. Members have mentioned the Department's moratorium on support for innovation. No cut is involved. The budget allocated for innovation has been used up. Next year, expenditure will be at broadly the same level. Since we came to power we have massively increased it by three times in real terms. The problem is that there has been so much demand for Government assistance with technology.

Mr. John Smith: Why was that important announcement made through a parliamentary answer—the well-known parliamentary subterfuge for concealing information? Why did the Minister not come to the House today and tell us clearly that all research and development project applications and all support for the microelectronic industry were to stop? Even if the Government do not have sufficient money overall, they should allocate money to help those firms.

Mr. Lamont: I had intended to refer to that matter whether or not the right hon. and learned Gentleman had mentioned it. It is ludicrous for him to suggest that at the same time as the autumn statement there should have been another statement from another Minister.

We would take the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East more seriously on the matter of jobs if we had not seen him on our television screens giving unequivocal support to the miners. The hon. Gentleman cut his political teeth in 1966 during the national seamen's strike. At that time he urged the then Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, to keep out of the dispute. He said, "All Mr. Wilson wants is for us to have a drink with the lads and a sausage cut by Mary." Since then he has adopted a different attitude. He now wants the Government to become more involved, but we will not become involved in a strike which the hon. Gentleman knows is costing jobs. Output is 1 per cent. below what it would have been without the strike. The strike is costing jobs in the firms that supply the NCB. It is costing jobs because interest rates are higher than they would otherwise have been.

If my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was minded to take the advice of the Opposition and take a risk with inflation, he could not do so, because confidence in sterling has been dented below what is economically justified as a result of the strike.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Havant said, the strike, both through its existence and far more if it were successful, threatens jobs in our electricity intensive industries. Coal is vital to the cost of electricity and electricity is vital to many of our capital intensive industries. The strike could have cost even more jobs if the Opposition's friends had been successful in closing down

jobs in the steel industry. They were not successful. That is the link between the strike and jobs. We might not expect the Bishop of Durham to understand that, but we expect someone who hopes to be Secretary of State for Employment to understand it.

The Opposition have sought to imply that there has been no economic recovery—or that is what they used to imply. They now imply that the recovery, although taking place, will not last. The fact is that in 1983 our gross domestic product grew faster than that in any of the other member countries of the EEC, while our inflation was below the EEC average. This year there would have been higher growth had it not been for the miners' strike. Nevertheless, my right hon. Friend has forecast that there will be growth of 3½ per cent. in 1985. That is a winning combination and the best performance by Britain since the 1960s.

That has been accompanied by truly remarkable levels of productivity gains in industry. Productivity between 1980 and 1983 has grown by 3½ per cent. and has risen by 20 per cent. in three years in manufacturing. That is, no doubt, part of the problem of unemployment. It is also one reason why the Chancellor can be confident about the prospects for exports, which are expected to grow this year by 7 per cent.

The Opposition amendment refers to the need to rebuild our industrial base. Our industrial base may be changing, but it is not disappearing. We may have had contraction in industries such as steel and shipbuilding, but that has been offset by growth in other industries. Our electronics industry is the fastest growing electronics industry in Europe. Microchip production over the past two years has been growing at rates of 35 and 40 per cent.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East sought to concentrate on the narrower definitions of manufacturing output alone. He said that manufacturing output remains below the 1979 level, but he did not mention that the decline has been taking place for a long time. The 1979 peak, as he chose to call it, was five points below that of 1974. The decline in manufacture as a proportion of GDP is a phenomenon that is common to many industrialised countries throughout the world.

Mr. John Smith *rose*——

Mr. Lamont: The Government can only create the conditions in which growth can take place. Within those conditions it is up to firms and individuals. The right hon. and learned Gentleman astonished everyone in the Chamber when he referred to lack of demand and went on to instance the car industry. We are always told that we need a larger car industry. We are always told that we need a larger car market, but in 1983 car sales reached an all-time record level in Britain. The problem was that imports exceeded the number of cars that we produced. Car sales in 1984 will not be so high, but will not be far off the 1983 level. The Government believe that the demand exists and that the market exists.

It is encouraging that we have seen signs of improvement in British Leyland. The company has introduced new models and much praise has been given by Ministers to all those in the industry. It is therefore all the more regrettable, and almost unbelievable, that after so much ground has been recovered the workers in the industry seem determined to return to the bad old ways. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) said, it is a pity that the unions in the car industry cannot follow the example of the car unions in the United States, which have settled with General Motors for a wage increase that is below the rate of inflation. The United States has the fastest growing economy in the world, yet its car unions are still more interested in job security than in inflationary wage increases.

The shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer said recently that the Labour party wanted a high-profit economy. He did not say it very loudly, and if he had said it more loudly we might have an Opposition worth worrying about. However, it is encouraging that some of the changed attitudes which the Government have helped to bring about are even reaching the shores of the Labour party. Socialists used to think that it was a sin to make profits, whereas Conservatives have always believed that it was wrong to make losses. I hope that the shadow Chancellor will rejoice that we have seen such a sharp upturn in company profits, which have risen by nearly a quarter in the first half of 1983 and 1984. The net rate of return is now back to a level which has not been seen since the 1960s. These profits will mean more jobs and more investment.

Total fixed investment, contrary to what the Leader of the Opposition said in his extraordinarily inaccurate speech in response to the Gracious Speech, is at an all-time high. Investment in manufacturing industry is increasing this year by about 15 per cent. I am glad that the shadow Chancellor welcomes the increase in profits. I am sure that he will welcome also the results of our privatisation programme. Every one of the companies that has been privatised by the Government has reported improved results. The profits of Cable and Wireless have doubled. The profits of Associated British Ports have nearly trebled in the first year after privatisation. The National Freight Corporation has had a profit of over £22 million, whereas it hardly broke even when it was in the state sector. The profits of British Aerospace are up by some 76 per cent., it has a £5 billion order book, and it has participated in the largest ever civil aerospace order obtained in this country.

Much of the emphasis in the Queen's Speech is on competition and on opening up our economy to the fuller workings of the market place. It may be difficult for the Opposition to see the connection between competition and more jobs, but unless our economy is more flexible and responsive to the needs of the consumer we shall not generate those new jobs. As the hon. Member for Stockton, South said, privatisation has to be accompanied by more competition. That is why, in telecommunications, we have liberalised not just the basic network but the value added network services and the supply of apparatus. One needs only to look in any colour supplement at any weekend to see the new range of equipment on sale as a result of the lifting of BT's monopoly on apparatus. It is only by opening up our new industries to competition that we shall grab a respectable share of the world market.

The Opposition are against change. The other day the Leader of the Opposition had the effrontery to call my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer a Luddite. I think that that will go down in history as one of the most brazen examples of the pot calling the kettle black. The Opposition are against competition. They favour monopolies and are putty in the hands of any special interest group.

This is particularly true of the miners' strike, because that strike symbolises the wider struggle for change in our

[Mr. Lamont]

economy. It was good of the Leader of the Opposition to find time in his busy diary to drop in to this debate. He is wrong to support the strike, because while Mr. Scargill may say that it is in defence of jobs, it is a strike that will destroy jobs. I may be doing the right hon. Gentleman an injustice. I accused him of supporting the miners' strike, but the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) has said that the Leader of the Opposition is giving the strike only halfhearted support. I suspect that the truth is much worse. It is that his attitude is determined by how he thinks the strike is going. If the strike were going much more the miners' way, the right hon. Gentleman would be taking a different attitude. If there were any principle to the right hon. Gentleman's stance, he would have said that it was not the absence of a slot in his diary, but the absence of a ballot that caused him to cold shoulder Arthur Scargill. That would have been a good reason, but the Opposition's attitude to the ballot is like that of the Devil to holy water—they are not in favour of it.

We have heard nothing new today—just the same, tatty, tawdry, mildewed solutions. The shadow Chancellor wrote after the last election that the Opposition's policies had been a net vote loser. So what did they do? Under the title "The Future that Works", they brought out a document with the same policies that had been rejected by the electorate. The only interesting thing about the document was that its title bore an uncanny resemblance to that of a book written by the leader of the SDP, the right hon. Member for Devonport, except that his was called "A Future that will Work". Both of them offer the same old, tired solutions. They advocate more expenditure, which will simply drive up interest rates, fuel inflation and destroy jobs. Higher expenditure is not the way to cure unemployment. If it were, we should increase expenditure until the problem of unemployment was solved.

The Government and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor have plotted a course. It may be a hard path, but there is no easier way and it is certainly not a journey without hope. For that reason, I urge my hon. Friends to reject the Opposition's amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 196, Noes 353.

Division No. 3] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Don Dixon.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
McCusker, Harold
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, J.
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Proctor, K. Harvey
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev W. M. *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter

Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Donald Thompson.

Question accordingly negatived.
It being after Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.
Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Hyndburn (Housing)

10.15 pm

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Major.]*

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): In bringing to the attention of the House the housing problem in Hyndburn, I begin by acknowledging with gratitude the interest in and concern for these problems which the Government have shown while I have represented that constituency. Last year's housing investment programme allocation for Hyndburn was increased by 16 per cent. while other authorities had theirs reduced. The Minister for Housing and Construction visited Accrington and Oswaldtwistle in April and was most impressed with what he saw, especially the quadrangle scheme in the centre of Oswaldtwistle. On Thursday, we met the Minister to discuss our problems. No one can, therefore, accuse the Government of not being interested in our problems.

Last year's increase in HIP was welcome. We have had an increase of 54 per cent. during the past five years. Although 54 per cent. seems impressive, it is largely because we started from a low base. Nevertheless, we were grateful. I do not wish to give the impression that we are always moaning; rather I wish to set out the real worries of the council and its conscientious members. It has identified the problems and devised policies to solve them but is frustrated in so doing by a lack of resources. Not to draw the Government's attention to the position and its financial implications would be irresponsible.

I realise that the Government have made it a cornerstone of their policy to ensure that public expenditure does not consume too great a proportion of the nation's wealth. I support them in that, just as I support their policy to extend owner-occupation. Because I support it, I am asking for money to be spent now. It will give real value for money. The spending of relatively small amounts now will prevent the need to spend much larger sums at a later date.

We either improve our present substandard houses and thereby keep them in the private sector, or we allow them to deteriorate still further so that eventually they must be demolished and replaced by council houses at five times the cost. It does not seem to make sense, on the one hand to pursue a policy of widening owner-occupation by selling council houses to tenants—Hyndburn borough council did it long before it was compulsory to do so—while, on the other hand, allowing existing owner-occupied properties to fall into disrepair, be demolished and replaced by council houses. That would not be in line with Government policy.

I ask the Minister to consider the case of an old lady who lives in one of Hyndburn's typical old terraced houses with no inside toilet or bath, which is in serious disrepair. There are thousands of such houses in Hyndburn. Consider also the implications for public spending of dealing with her problem. The council can improve her home through a grant at a cost to public funds of some £4,000. Alternatively, it can allow the house to deteriorate, eventually demolish it and rehouse her in a new council house at a cost of £20,000. The implications for public spending do not end there.

The old lady, now happily rehoused, will find that the rent on her new house is the average Hyndburn rent of £16 a week, which she cannot afford. She will therefore qualify for the average Hyndburn rebate of £11 for the next 20 years of her life. Whereas an improvement grant would have left her free from support from public funds, such funds now have to find £11,400 for 20 years—a total of £31,400. In other words it will cost almost £32,000 to rehouse an old lady in an area to which she does not want to go. For one eighth of that sum she could have remained in familiar surroundings.

What, then, can be done? Bearing in mind the Government's economic and housing policies, it seems necessary to find a way in which to concentrate spending on the small number of authorities with the worst pre-1919 owner-occupied houses—what we may designate as housing stress areas. The concept of such areas has no formal history as it has been invented by officers of Hyndburn borough council. It does, however, have obvious antecedents in inner urban area designation.

The main thrust of the Government's housing policy has been to promote owner-occupation by extending its availability to people in lower income groups. There are, however, a small number of areas in the country where high levels of owner-occupation have already been achieved due to the self-reliance and independence of the inhabitants and the way in which they have resisted the onslaught of municipal Socialism in housing. They take pride in owning their own home, and therefore in these areas the problem is not to promote owner-occupation, but to retain it. While the Government have concentrated on providing effective policies to promote new owner-occupation, they have, perhaps, understandably, not paid sufficient attention to the problems of boroughs such as Hyndburn with its 80 per cent. owner-occupied properties of which 40 per cent. are substandard and in need of major renovation. Policies such as the sale of council houses, low-cost home ownership schemes and the removal of restraints on private builders, important though they are in the national context, are of only minor relevance in Hyndburn where there are few council houses to sell. The availability of capital receipts from council house sales has been a major source of investment resource in many authorities with large numbers of high-priced council houses for sale. This, however, has not been Hyndburn's case. According to the generalised needs index, Hyndburn has 0·255 per cent. of the country's housing need, yet its

capital receipts as a percentage of the national figure are only one-tenth of that amount. Despite having the largest percentage of physically substandard properties in the country according to a recent Shelter survey, Hyndburn's HIP allocation, plus usable capital receipts was some 5 per cent. below the national per capita average—largely due to the very low potential for raising capital receipts. This clearly makes it more difficult for Hyndburn to tackle its housing problems.

I am not suggesting that the Government have not helped owner-occupiers — they have — with improvements in the grant system, and through sizeable increases in the amount of money for renovation grants in 1983-84 as opposed to 1978-79. Last year, local authorities were allowed to spend as much as they wished on renovation grants. Some authorities, of which Hyndburn was one, were not able to take full advantage of this because of the revenue costs of such spending and the effect it would have on rate support grant penalties. The increases in Hyndburn's housing expenditure since 1978-79 have added 5·4 per cent. to Hyndburn's total rate-borne expenditure, which means that Hyndburn would have had to make far greater cuts than other councils in other areas of expenditure if it was to reduce its expenditure to target levels.

A further reason for the difficulties which Hyndburn and similar areas face is the GREA system itself, where indicators used to measure the need for revenue expenditure are biased towards the needs that are most associated with private renting and multi-occupation. Under the definition used in the 1981 census, sharing occurs only when there is no common living or sitting room and no common meals. Such sharing is rare in Hyndburn. Most people in shared accommodation in the borough live with relatives and share housekeeping. The 1981 census shows only 115 households in the borough living in shared accommodation. However, at the time of the census, there were 350 applications on the housing waiting list describing themselves as living in shared accommodation, usually with relations, from which they wished to be rehoused.

Hyndburn would argue that on this basis its housing needs are heavily underscored. For example, a single parent with a child living with one set of parents, and perhaps her brother or sister, in a two-bedroomed owner-occupied terrace house would not score any GREA points unless the accommodation lacked a basic amenity. However, if the same size house were split into four bed-sitting rooms with a shared bathroom and inside toilet, with a single parent living in one room and a single person in each of the others, those people, with the same physical housing conditions, would add three times as much to the authority's GREA as the people in the previous situation.

The result of this is that despite having the very high need for spending in the private sector, to which I have already referred, Hyndburn has a GREA for revenue spending on private sector housing which is only 1·5 per cent. above the national per capita average. The GREA is only about one-third of what the authority actually spends on trying to retain owner-occupation.

The Government are reviewing the grant system and are concerned to ensure that grants go only to houses that would not otherwise have been renovated. This is already occurring in Hyndburn. Resources are having to be concentrated on the areas of greatest need, which is why I suggested that the Government should similarly concentrate their resources by declaring housing stress areas into which additional capital and revenue resources could be invested to help areas with the highest levels of owner-occupied properties that were substandard and in need of repair. Such designation would be wholly justified. Individuals who have invested into their homes their resources, which are limited because we are a low-wage area, need to be protected. They need grants to be made available to ensure that the inability of others living in the same terrace to afford to repair their properties unaided does not threaten the future viability of the whole row.

Government action is needed to prove to these people that there is a long-term future for low-income owner-occupation. Unless some way is found to provide additional help in Hyndburn it will be 30 years before all our owner-occupied households can enjoy basic amenities in properties free from major defects. Even on the unreasonable assumption that there will be no deterioration in the meantime and no improvements above basic standards, the average terraced properties, many still with Tippler toilets at the bottom of the yard, will have reached their 130th year before being brought up to adequate standards.

I believe that the thrifty, hard-working people of Hyndburn deserve better than that, and I urge the Government to accept my suggestions or to find other ways of helping Hyndburn and areas similar to it where help is not only needed but is appreciated and where resources are used wisely.

10.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir George Young): The House is very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) for the way that he has developed the case for more resources for his constituents living in Hyndburn. He brought a deputation to my Department last Thursday, and I was extremely impressed by the responsible and well argued approach adopted by the councillors and officials whom I met and by the way that the case had been prepared in some documents which I found compelling reading.

What came through my meeting with my hon. Friend was the genuine concern of the councillors and the local Member for the housing problems that we still have to tackle in Hyndburn and the determination to tackle them without simply whining and demanding a share of increasing public resources which simply are not available.

The case that my hon. Friend has just put to the House was again very well argued. I was impressed by the cost-benefit analysis which he put forward, basically arguing that money spent on improvement grants now will ensure that it is not necessary to demolish buildings in a few years' time with all the financial cost and social disruption that would accompany wholesale demolition.

My hon. Friend also made the point that the Government's commitment to owner-occupation made it a safety net for those low income households who are owner-occupiers who may not be able to afford the substantial repairs that are necessary from time to time without the help of improvement grants.

My hon. Friend has been diligent. As I said, he led a deputation to my Department last week. He has initiated this debate this evening and I understand that he is seeing another Minister in my Department later this week to

[Sir George Young]

develop the case for local government finance and the resources that go to Hyndburn through the rate support grant.

One has to address oneself to the particular issues facing Hyndburn. It came through at the meeting that the position there is unusual mainly because of the high proportion of owner-occupiers. I assure my hon. Friend that his concern is understood and shared by the Government, and I want to show how our policies are helping him and his colleagues in Hyndburn to tackle the issues that he has mentioned.

Although I have not visited Hyndburn, my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction did so at my hon. Friend's invitation in April, and I know from talking to him that that visit made a deep impression on him.

The sheer scale of the problems—in particular the long terraces of stone built houses with sagging walls and roofs, now at the end of their lives unless quick action is taken—was one part of the impression the visit made. Another was the ways in which action can be and is being taken.

My hon. Friend was particularly encouraged by the successful involvement of housing associations in rehabilitation of older housing which he saw at the Bradford and Northern Housing Association scheme at the Quadrangle, Oswaldtwistle, and with the efforts made and the continuing potential for private sector area improvement.

The north-east Lancashire towns have certain housing characteristics which mark them out from most other parts of the country. One of these, which I touched on a moment ago, is the traditionally high rate of home ownership. This is not surprising as the area was one of the cradles of the building society movement.

In Hyndburn's case there are some 27,000 privately owned dwellings—84 per cent. of the total stock—which is way above the national average at 60 to 63 per cent. Equally characteristic is the large proportion of terraced houses, built before 1919.

In Accrington, many houses were built with stone facing, but rubble filled walls, a particular cause of instability and an expensive problem, where instability occurs, to put right.

The ready availability of older terraced housing has acted as a disincentive to new house building. When a terraced house can be bought improved for no more than £7,000 or unimproved for as little as £3,000 or less, the market for new houses at £16,000 is severely inhibited. My hon. Friend the Minister learned that at first hand from a developer who had been vigorously marketing two sites in the borough but where sales have been disappointing. "Low cost homes", in such an area, has a different meaning from the usual one. For someone like myself as a London Member used to London prices, the sort of figures that I have just been quoting seem remarkable.

The combination of a high percentage of owner-occupiers coupled with low house prices mark out Hyndburn as being somewhat unusual compared with other parts of the country.

The low house prices also have an effect on the value for money of carrying out housing improvement. It is far harder to make the economies of improvement stack up when the value added may be less than half the cost of doing the work.

Another problem for Hyndburn, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn and his councillors described on Thursday and which the Government fully recognise, is that the ability to generate capital receipts is limited. Hyndburn's stock of council houses was small to start with and I am aware that sales under the right to buy have not so far been as high as in other parts of the country.

I know that one of the issues that concerns the local authority is the absence of any adequate national arrangements which would take into account the ability of individual local authorities to finance investment from capital receipts. It is, however, the case that some account is taken of this fact. The reduction this year in the prescribed proportion of capital receipts which individual authorities could spend from 50 per cent. to 40 per cent. increased the amount of those receipts which were available for allocation centrally by my Department. This specific step was taken so that areas such as Hyndburn could benefit. I shall be returning to allocation later on.

I very much hope that the Housing and Building Control Act 1984 will help to stimulate home ownership through the right to buy and, in particular, that it will enable less well off people to get started in becoming owners of their homes. The Act has introduced increased discounts so that secure tenants of 30 years' standing now qualify for a 60 per cent. rather than 50 per cent. reduction; secure tenants now qualify to claim the right to buy after only two years instead of three years' tenancy; and there is an entitlement to buy on an equity sharing basis. Tenants of leasehold property have also had the right to buy extended to them—a significant fact in a number of parts of the north-west.

Our object in that legislation has been to bring home ownership within the reach of the largest number of people possible. We have also tried to ensure that tenants are aware of their statutory rights by a large scale distribution of literature direct to tenants' homes to advise them how they can go about exercising the right to buy.

On capital resources, my hon. Friend recognised that the overriding factor must be the amount that can be made available for housing nationally. The Government have repeatedly made it clear that they are determined that public expenditure should not consume too great a proportion of the nation's wealth, and public sector housing has had to make its contribution.

Looking at longer-term prospects that emerge from that strategy, the lower rate of inflation which Government policies have achieved should lead to a more stable housing environment, and one in which investment decisions can be made against a more secure background. Housing has of course in the past contributed to reductions in public expenditure. However, the HIP total for 1984-85 was increased by more than £50 million compared with the 1983-84 figure.

The borough council of Hyndburn received an allocation for 1984-85 of £3·675 million, which was an increase in cash terms of 16·1 per cent. on the 1983-4 allocation. That was a substantial increase—one of the largest in the north-west.

That allocation recognised the particular spending needs of the borough, not least the need for private sector improvement, which formed a large part of my hon. Friend's speech. Allocations are determined partly on the basis of the generalised needs index and partly at the discretion of the Department's regional office. The GNI is the best objective assessment of need that we have. It

is kept under regular review and is agreed annually with the local authority associations. Even so, it is not perfect and, in order to compensate for factors which are not easily measured or are peculiar to particular areas, regional offices may distribute a proportion of resources, 50 per cent. in 1984-5, according to their perception of need. In addition, authorities may add capital receipts to their allocation.

However, this year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had to ask authorities to restrain their capital spending in 1984-85 and, in particular, not to use receipts accumulated in previous years. Returns made by authorities had shown that, unless action was taken, a substantial overspending on the local authority capital expenditure cash limit would have been likely. That would have been in addition to the actual overspending in 1983-4.

Most authorities have complied with the request. Hyndburn, I understand, is one of them; and I should like the council to know how grateful we are for its co-operation. I know the difficult decisions that it has had to take in order to limit its spending.

In September, authorities were asked to continue to exercise restraint. This is not a moratorium; we do not believe that a moratorium would be justified in terms of the extra savings that it might produce. We shall keep the position under review in the light of authorities' expenditure returns.

My hon. Friend was worried that there might be a bias built into our allocation process in favour of districts that have inner urban area status. An inner area weighting is applied to the GNI scores and authorities that have this status. That is because the areas selected have particular concentrations of need, in housing as well as in other terms, which marks them out from other authorities. Of course, many authorities have problems in particular areas —sometimes even over quite large areas—which would match those of inner urban authorities. But it is the scale and the intensity of the problems in the latter case, as measured by the most objective means that we have, which has led to their selection for special help.

It has been a fundamental part of inner urban area policy that special help should not merely be available through the urban programme, but also through main programmes, including the housing investment programme. I assure my hon. Friend that the particular problems of his authority will continue to be taken into consideration when allocations are made. Looking at the figures for the current year, I see that Hyndburn has had a very substantial allocation under the traditional urban programme.

My hon. Friend referred to the difficulties facing the elderly. Hyndburn, in common with other areas in the north-west, has a relatively large number of elderly people and there is, therefore, a need for some degree of support to enable old people to lead as independent lives as they can for as long as possible. This may take the form of sheltered accommodation. Hyndburn's new housebuilding proposals for 1985-86 relate entirely to provision for the elderly. However, I would commend the research report by Dr. Anthea Tinker in my Department entitled "Staying at Home: Helping Elderly People". We sent copies to all housing authorities as well as social services and health authorities on 16 October. The report examines in detail alternatives to sheltered housing or institutional care which enable the more dependent elderly to remain in their own homes. The evidence is that that is what most old people wish to do. Alarm and care schemes are often cheaper than sheltered housing. In addition to the alarm systems there must be adequate support services. The support of families and neighbours is thus extremely important. In Lancashire there is a tradition of neighbourliness and community support which has a crucial part to play in the care of the growing number of very elderly people. I hope that the council will look carefully at Dr. Tinker's report from the point of view both of the best interest of older residents and of making the best use of finite resources.

The renovation of privately-owned dwellings is particularly relevant to Hyndburn as some 84 per cent. of its stock is privately owned. The higher grant rates and the inducement of additional allocations available under the indicative figure system were intended not only as a measure to help the building industry but also to encourage improvements in the private sector stock.

My hon. Friend mentioned improvement grants, and I was interested to hear what he said about Hyndburn's policy of trying to concentrate improvement grant resources on those who most needed them. He urged the Government to do likewise. A consultation paper on proposed changes is expected to be published shortly. A simplification of the system is certainly one of our main objectives, but another objective, which my hon. Friend touched on, is the securing of better value for money. I share the view that it is important to seek ways of targeting the resources towards the people and properties which most need them. I am sure that my hon. Friend and his local authority will find the proposals that we have to make of considerable interest. No doubt the authority will wish to ensure that the proposals that my hon. Friend has outlined for housing stress areas to be designated are included in its response to the consultation.

During the past two years, Hyndburn has been able to spend a considerable amount compared to previous years on improvements in the private sector—£1·6 million in 1982-83 and £1·8 million in 1983-84 when the borough council benefited from an additional retrospective allocation of nearly £250,000 under the indicative figure arrangements. The council has expressed concern about the revenue consequences of capital spending, not least in area improvement activity, which is staff intensive. That is something that my hon. Friend may wish to develop when he sees my colleague later this year.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the very positive and constructive way in which he has approached the housing problems of his constituents. They have good cause to thank him for putting their interests so clearly before us. When we make the allocations for Hyndburn later this year, we shall of course take his remarks fully into account and do what we can to tackle the problems that he has mentioned. We share with him a determination to make further progress.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 13 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LOCHABER WATER POWER ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time.

CLOSURE OF DEBATE (STANDING ORDER No. 31)

Return ordered,

respecting applications of Standing Order No. 31 (Closure of debate) during Session 1983-84, (1) in the House and in Committee of the whole House, under the following heads:—

1	2	3	4	5	6
Date when Closure claimed, and by whom	Question before House or Committee when claimed	Whether in House or Committee	Whether assent given to Motion or withheld by the Chair	Assent withheld because, in the opinion of the Chair, a decision would shortly be arrived at without that Motion	Result of Motion and, if a Division, Numbers for and against

and (2) in the Standing Committees under the following heads:—

1	2	3	4	5
Date when Closure claimed, and by whom	Question before Committee when claimed	Whether assent given to Motion or withheld by the Chair	Assent withheld because, in the opinion of the Chair, a decision would shortly be arrived at without that Motion	Result of Motion and, if a Division, Numbers for and against

—[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Return ordered,

of the number of Instruments considered in Session 1983-84 by the Joint Committee and the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments respectively pursuant to their orders of reference, showing in each case the numbers of Instruments subject to the different forms of parliamentary procedure and of those within the Committees' orders of reference for which no parliamentary procedure is prescribed by statute, and the numbers drawn to the special attention of the House or of both Houses distinguishing the ground in the Committees' orders of reference upon which such attention was invited; and of the numbers of Instruments considered by a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. and by the House respectively, in Session 1983-84, showing the number where the question on the proceedings relating thereto was put forthwith under Standing Order No. 79(5).—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

PRIVATE BILLS AND PRIVATE BUSINESS

Return ordered,

of the number of Private Bills, Hybrid Bills and Bills for confirming Provisional Orders introduced into this House and brought from the House of Lords, and of Acts passed in Session 1983-84:

Of all Private Bills, Hybrid Bills and Bills for confirming Provisional Orders which in Session 1983-84 were reported on by Committees on Opposed Bills or by Committees nominated partly by the House and partly by the Committee of Selection, together with the names of the selected Members who served on each Committee; the first and also the last day of the sitting of each Committee; the number of days on which each Committee sat; the number of days on which each selected Member served; the number of days occupied by each Bill in Committee; the Bills of which the Preambles were reported to have been proved; the Bills of which the Preambles were reported to have been not proved; and, in the case of Bills for confirming Provisional Orders, whether the Provisional Order ought or ought not to be confirmed;

Of all Private Bills and Bills for confirming Provisional Orders which in Session 1983-84 were referred by the Committee of Selection to the Committee on Unopposed Bills, together with

the names of the Members who served on the Committee; the number of days on which the Committee sat; and the number of days on which each Member attended;

And of the number of Private Bills, Hybrid Bills and Bills for confirming Provisional Orders withdrawn or not proceeded with by the parties, those Bills being specified which were referred to Committees and dropped during the sittings of the Committee.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

PUBLIC BILLS

Return ordered,

of the number of Public Bills, distinguishing Government from other Bills, introduced into this House, or brought from the House of Lords, during Session 1983-84 showing:

(1) the number which received the Royal Assent, and

(2) the number which did not receive the Royal Assent, indicating those which were introduced into but not passed by this House, those passed by this House but not by the House of Lords, those passed by the House of Lords but not by this House, those passed by both Houses but amendments not agreed to; and distinguishing the stages at which such Bills were dropped, postponed or rejected in either House of Parliament, or the stages which such Bills had reached by the time of Prorogation.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

SELECT COMMITTEES

Return ordered,

of Select Committees, except Business Committees, in Session 1983-84, with the Sub-Committees appointed by them; the number of the meetings of each and the number of meetings each Member attended; and the number of Members who served on Select Committees; together with the total cost (estimated where necessary) in respect of each Select Committee and Sub-Committee for the financial year 1983-84 of:—the attendance of witnesses; overseas visits; visits within the United Kingdom; specialist advisers' remuneration and expenses respectively, and other work commissioned; entertainment; the preparation for publication of the Minutes of Evidence; and printing and publishing; with so much of the same information as is relevant to the Chairmen's Panel and the Court of Referees.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Return ordered,

of the days on which the House sat in Session 1983-84 stating for each day the day of the month and day of the week, the hour of the meeting, and the hour of the adjournment; and the total number of hours occupied in the sittings of the House, and the average time; and showing the number of hours on which the House sat each day, and the number of hours after the time appointed for the interruption of business.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

STANDING COMMITTEES

Return ordered,

for Session 1983-84, of (1) the total number and the names of all Members (including and distinguishing Chairmen) who have been appointed to serve on one or more of the Standing Committees showing, with regard to each of such Members, the number of sittings to which he was summoned and at which he was present; (2) the number of Bills, Estimates, Matters and other items referred to Standing Committees pursuant to Standing Order No. 79 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.) or Standing Order No. 80 (Standing Committees on European Community documents) considered by all and by each of the Standing Committees, the number of sittings of each Committee and the titles of all Bills, Estimates, Matters and other items as above considered by a Committee, distinguishing where a Bill was a Government Bill or was brought from the House of Lords, and showing in the case of each Bill, Estimate, Matter and other item, the particular Committee by whom it was considered, the number of sittings at which it was considered and the number of Members present at each of those sittings.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

SPECIAL PROCEDURE ORDERS

Return ordered,

of the number of Special Procedure Orders presented in Session 1983-84; the number withdrawn; the number against which Petitions or copies of Petitions were deposited; the number of Petitions of General Objection and for Amendment respectively considered by the Chairmen; the number of such Petitions certified by the Chairmen as proper to be received, and the number certified by them as being Petitions of General Objection and for Amendment respectively; the number referred to a Joint Committee of both Houses; the number reported with Amendments by a Joint Committee, and the number in relation to which a Joint Committee reported that the Order be not approved; and the number of Bills introduced for the confirmation of Special Procedure Orders:

Of Special Procedure Orders which, in Session 1983-84, were referred to a Joint Committee, together with the names of the Commons Members who served on each Committee; the number of days on which each Committee sat; and the number of days on which each such Member attended.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Trident Missiles

1. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the effect of the dollar-sterling parity change on the estimated cost of Trident in the last 12 months.

18. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimate of the cost of the Trident programme.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Heseltine): The Trident estimate is currently being reviewed as part of the annual recosting of the defence programme. On completion, I will announce a revised estimate to Parliament and the exchange rate applicable to it.

Mr. Leigh: Is my right hon. Friend aware that some Conservative Members, although fully committed to the maintenance of Britain's independent nuclear deterrent, are worried about the fact that because, according to some reports, £700 million has been added since last March to the cost of Trident due to the fall in the value of the pound, there is a need for a candid reassessment soon as to whether we can afford the Trident D5 system without damaging our conventional forces?

Mr. Heseltine: I know of my hon. Friend's interest in this matter. I had noticed his name on the Order Paper in connection with this issue. The open government document which was published at the time of the initial decision shows that the alternatives and the arguments were fully set out. In the Government's view, nothing has changed to alter the basis of our judgment.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Does he agree that changing technology as well as changing costs make it important to review the Trident system constantly with a view to getting value for money? Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that other nuclear weapons systems are kept under examination to ascertain whether they would offer an adequate deterrent at a lower cost?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for asking that question. If we felt that there was an alternative because of changing technology, we would have to consider it, as would any Government. It is a sign of the Government's willingness to consider their position that we moved from the Trident C4 to the Trident D5 system. It would be misleading to pretend that we have knowledge of some of the new technological development that calls for a review of the sort that has been suggested.

Mr. Douglas: Will the Secretary of State admit that since the open government document was published we have found that a higher proportion of expenditure will be incurred in the United States and that, therefore, the analysis of the dollar-sterling rate is of the utmost importance? When will the right hon. Gentleman come clean with the House and admit that an increase of 1 cent costs the country £25 million more and that the difference in the cost of this project is now about £700 million?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman knows that, in common with others who have held this job, I have responsibility to update the defence programme on a regular annual basis. That updating is carried out along the lines of conventions which were established under the previous Government, and we have stuck to them. If anything, I have tended, if possible, to bring forward the updating announcements of the Trident system. In view of the interest of the Public Accounts Committee and the Select Committee on Defence, I am trying to ascertain whether I can bring forward the updating of the latest review, which we are in the last stage of completing.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: Does the Secretary of State's total figure of public expenditure on Trident include the extra low frequency communications that are required? What is the specific cost of that part of the budget?

Mr. Heseltine: I think that the hon. Gentleman will accept that the cost includes the whole capital cost of introducing the Trident system, but I shall look specifically at the individual component part to which he has drawn my attention.

Mr. Boyes: Is the Secretary of State aware that the Opposition are committed to the defence of Britain, too, but find that Trident does not help in the slightest in that process? Is the right hon. Gentleman further aware that we find it impossible to explain to our constituents that, while the dollar-sterling parity rate has pushed up the price of the Trident submarine, council tenants will have to suffer because cuts are being made in repairs grants so that we can pay for that ludicrous weapon?

Mr. Heseltine: I am sure that it is more for the hon. Gentleman than for me to explain to his constituents why he thought Polaris was necessary. It has to be modernised with the Chevaline process. However, he thinks that Britain can now abandon the policies that have kept the peace for so long.

Sir Peter Blaker: Surely any alternative system would have to depend equally on American technology. Does my right hon. Friend know of an alternative system which is capable of penetrating the likely enemy defences by the mid-1990s and which comes anywhere near being less expensive than Trident?

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. Friend is correct. We looked carefully at the alternative systems, and we could not find a system that gives Britain the absolute insurance which we believe to be necessary to maintain our independent nuclear deterrent. That is why we chose the Trident system and why we are determined to introduce it into service. However, I remind the House that at the time of the open government document a considerable analysis of alternatives to the Trident system was carried out, and in some cases the analysis showed that alternatives would be less effective and more expensive.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Why is the Secretary of State so afraid to answer the question? Why does he not tell the House that, since we debated the Defence Estimates in the summer, the cost of Trident has gone up by £750 million? That is about five new frigates sunk on the foreign exchanges. Why does the right hon. Gentleman go through the charade of pretending that he can estimate the cost of Trident? Why does he not admit that he has no idea what the final cost will be?

Mr. Heseltine: It is intriguing that the right hon. Gentleman suggests that we do not know what the cost is and then presses me to reveal it earlier than we normally would. However, he will be fully aware that any estimates that we make will be trying to anticipate the exchange rates for the rest of the decade. The change may have taken place on the scale that he mentioned, which I shall not yet confirm or deny because we have not finally concluded the review, but the mere fact that he could say that there has been such an incredible change as a result of exchange rates must cause him some moments of doubt as to whether the exchange rates will not move the other way.

Shipbreaking (Asbestos Removal)

2. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will in future seek guarantees from the purchasers of naval vessels for purposes of shipbreaking, on the removal of asbestos from the vessels, before any sale is agreed.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. John Lee): It has long been our practice to emphasise to purchasers of surplus naval vessels offered for scrap the statutory requirement to conform with the regulations in force at the time on the handling of asbestos. Firms tendering for the work are required to certify that they will so comply.

Mr. Foulkes: In view of all the problems that the Health and Safety Executive has had with asbestos in the breaking up of the Ark Royal and the Bulwark at Cairnryan, and in view of the huge asbestos dump that has been discovered at Faslane, of all places, is it not grossly irresponsible of the Secretary of State to sell off those ships without getting a clear guarantee about the disposal of asbestos? Will the Minister consider the matter again? Will he also tell the people of Scotland what will happen to the dump at Faslane?

Mr. Lee: I know of the hon. Gentleman's sincerity and genuineness in that area. We have dealt with several letters from him in that regard. However, I ask him to preserve some balance. The shipbreaking industry employs about 500 people. We work as closely as possible with the Health and Safety Executive. We recently recast our tendering documents to draw the attention of purchasers of the hulks to the existence of asbestos. We are as concerned as everyone to ensure that that work is handled

carefully and satisfactorily. Where individual shipbreakers contravene the law they are prosecuted, as is the case at present.

The asbestos at Faslane was originally tipped well before regulations came into force and before the general concern about asbestos. We are carefully examining the whole site. It is fenced off, and no work is taking place at present.

Soviet SS Missiles

3. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the total number of SS missile warheads targeted on western Europe; and how this figure compares with one year and five years ago.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Stanley): The number of warheads on SS20 missiles facing west is 729. No new bases facing western Europe have been completed in the past year, but further bases are currently under construction in both the eastern and western USSR which, when operational, could significantly increase the number of SS20s. The number of SS20s has trebled since 1979.

Mr. Chapman: Do not those figures show conclusively that the Soviet Government have not negotiated seriously between 1979 and 1983 when, if they had reduced the number of their SS warheads, the West would not have needed to deploy cruise and Pershing? Has not the Soviet Union escalated the arms race and increased tension in Europe? Are not the figures a timely reminder to people in Europe that the British Government must pursue multilateral disarmament in the years ahead?

Mr. Stanley: My hon. Friend is right. Regrettably, the INF negotiations in Geneva have not made progress, and responsibility for the lack of progress lies firmly on the Soviet side. My hon. Friend is also right to point out that the INF escalation has been on the Soviet side. The SS20 deployment started two years before NATO even decided on its own INF deployment and six years before any cruise or Pershing II deployment.

Mr. James Lamond: Did the figures given by the Minister come from the same rather unreliable source which recently categorically stated that MiG fighters were being unloaded in Nicaragua?

Mr. Stanley: Those figures have been published before, and we believe that they are absolutely reliable.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Can my right hon. Friend confirm press reports that SS20s have been sited in Latvia, Lithuania or Estonia? Will he also confirm that it is still the West's plan to withdraw existing cruise missiles and not to position any more such missiles in this country if the Soviet Union is prepared to withdraw its SS20s?

Mr. Stanley: I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand that I cannot comment on the detailed locations of SS20 sites. However, I assure him that the INF offer which the NATO countries have made remains on the table. The zero option remains on the table, together with the modification of an agreement with the Soviet Union on the basis of equal numbers at a lesser figure than those now deployed. Those offers remain firmly on the table, and it is our earnest hope that the Soviet Union will negotiate on that basis.

Mr. Strang: Is the Minister aware that these deployments are to be deplored? Does he accept that the Soviet Union is doing exactly what it said it would do and that the deployment of these weapons is a direct consequence of the breakdown of the INF talks, which was caused by the decision of the West to press ahead with the deployment of cruise and, in particular, Pershing II?

Mr. Stanley: The hon. Gentleman could not have listened to the chronology that I gave. Deployment of the SS20 missiles began six years before the start of cruise and Pershing II deployment.

Nimrod Aircraft

4. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received relating to the servicing of Nimrod aircraft.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Adam Butler): Various representations on this subject have been received, including those from my hon. Friend.

Mr. Favell: Can my right hon. Friend tell us whether the major servicing of Nimrod aircraft is about to be put out to competitive tender? Does he know that the very survival of the Nimrod production and design team at Woodford depends on its being awarded that contract? Is my right hon. Friend aware of the value of that team to Britain's defence effort, both now and in the future, and will he beware of being penny wise and pound foolish?

Mr. Butler: I am aware of the concern at BA Woodford, and I can confirm that the deep servicing of Nimrod will be put out to competition. The matter is being considered very carefully. We need to identify whether companies are likely to be able to undertake the work and obtain the necessary security clearance. Therefore, it is taking us some time to reach the point at which contracts will be put out.

Mr. Dalyell: Have there been any representations on the malfunction of the Nimrod's AD470 high frequency Marconi transceiver equipment and its communications with Ascencion Island and with Cheltenham? The right hon. Gentleman will know why I ask.

Mr. Butler: I have not received representations on that subject.

Trident Missiles

5. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will reconsider Her Majesty's Government's decision to purchase the Trident II weapons system.

Mr. Heseltine: No, Sir.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Secretary of State agree that the acquisition of the independent Trident II system not only upsets the conventional-nuclear balance and ties us to the United States for both procurement and maitenance, but, even more importantly, flies in the face of recent moves within Europe and the Western European Union towards a more concerted European policy for defence and strategic purposes?

Mr. Heseltine: I do not think that I would agree. Under all post-war Governments Britain has always taken the

view that it should maintain its own last-resort nuclear deterrent. That remains the position of the present Government.

Mr. Bill Walker: Was not the decision on Trident II taken in the knowledge that, over the next 30 years, the revenue implications of the alternative systems for providing a credible deterrent were horrendous?

Mr. Heseltine: That most important point was covered in the open government document of 1980, which showed that one of the alternatives—the cruise missile—would have been 30 per cent. more expensive to buy and twice as expensive to operate.

Mr. Soames: Now that there is real hope of progress in East-West talks, particularly under the new umbrella concept, would it not be fatal to destabilise the present and future nuclear balance in Europe, pending multilateral disarmament? Accordingly, will my right hon. Friend press ahead with the programme?

Mr. Heseltine: The Government are totally committed to multinational talks about arms and, I hope, agreements. Now that it seems that talks might start again, the House should remember that we were told that if we proceeded with the deployment of cruise missiles such a constructive dialogue would never take place. However, the Government took the view that a constructive dialogue would become much more likely, and it looks as though we may have been right.

Mr. Denzil Davies: What effect, if any, will the sale of the warships division of British Shipbuilders have on the building of Trident at Barrow? Have not the merchant bankers who are advising the Government said that any prospectus must contain a guarantee to any purchaser that the Government will continue with the Trident programme?

Mr. Heseltine: Our contractual agreements with the builders of the Trident submarine will be exactly what one would expect of an arm's-length relationship between a contractor and the Government.

NATO (Military Committee)

6. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what were his latest discussions with the military committee of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend does not have direct discussions with NATO's military committee. However, he and his Alliance ministerial colleagues were last briefed by the chairman of the military committee during a ministerial session of NATO's defence planning committee in May this year.

Mr. Barron: Has the Secretary of State had any involvement with our chief of staff and ambassador to NATO? Agreement has been reached in principle on the new policy of follow-on force attack, which is a policy of offensive attack and a rethinking of the treatment of the East in time of warfare. Many hon. Members believe that the policy of follow-on force attack should be debated in the House before it is agreed by the Secretary of State, because it has major implications for the likelihood of warfare in the world.

Mr. Stanley: The hon. Gentleman misrepresents the NATO concept of follow-on force attack. We support the concept, which is consistent with the long-standing NATO concern about the threat represented by Soviet and Warsaw pact second echelon forces. It would be wrong for us in our defensive posture not to take account of the threat represented by those forces.

Mr. Wilkinson: If NATO were to forgo the possibility of interdicting the battlefield, would it not leave itself vulnerable to the huge masses of men and material that could be brought forward on the interior lines of communications enjoyed by the Warsaw pact? Is not that possibility essential for the defence of the West?

Mr. Stanley: My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Is it not a fact that at the next NATO meeting in December the airland battle, follow-on force attack, deep strike, or whatever phrase is used to describe it, will be confirmed? Does the Minister agree that many people are worried if that is the case, as it will mean that NATO will appear to be an aggressive rather than a defensive organisation? Would it not also mean that there could be rearmament in Europe and that nuclear weapons would be used even earlier under NATO strategy than is envisaged now?

Mr. Stanley: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong in every respect. There is no change in NATO's defensive posture. The concept of follow-on force attack is purely defensive. It is concerned with how we would deal with the significant threat of the follow-on force of the Warsaw pact after it had committed an act of aggression against NATO countries.

RAF Trainer

7. **Mr. Chope** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce a decision on the replacement of the Royal Air Force trainer.

17. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce his decision on the new Royal Air Force basic trainer to replace the jet Provost.

Mr. Butler: It is hoped to announce a decision around the turn of the year.

Mr. Chope: What criteria will the Government use when deciding what trainer should replace the existing one?

Mr. Butler: As my hon. Friend would expect, the usual criteria will apply, and they will include the operational performance of the aeroplane. It must meet the needs of the Royal Air Force. However, we shall take into account the issue of jobs in the United Kingdom, examine sales prospects and international relations and many other considerations.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. I am sure he is aware that there is an acrimonious battle going on between some of the contenders, especially about the United Kingdom content. Therefore, the sooner a decision can be made, the better. My right hon. Friend will know that hon. Members are being inundated with requests. Will he assure the House that, when weighing up all the factors, the preference of the Royal Air Force will be given top priority, following its extensive evaluation process?

Mr. Butler: In regard to the second part of my hon. Friend's question, I cannot add to what I said in my second answer. I am glad to say that all four contenders have a high level of United Kingdom manufacturing content.

Mr. Maginnis: Is the Minister aware that should Shorts' Tucano be selected that would produce more new jobs than would any of the other contestants? Is he also aware that it is a long time since the Ministry of Defence has supported Shorts by giving it an order for aircraft? As it has recently gained a most prestigious order from the United States Air Force, is it not time that the Ministry of Defence considered placing an order as well?

Mr. Butler: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am very sensitive to Shorts' position, but I shall remain completely objective in regard to this selection. The number of jobs involved in any order will be conditioned by the initial order from the RAF and by the prospect of overseas sales.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Minister agree that the only aircraft that is designed fully to meet the RAF's requirements is the AAC/Westland submission? Is he aware that choosing that aircraft could produce significant reciprocal Far Eastern orders for British industry? Does he agree that it is important that the RAF should have aircraft adequate to meet its requirements?

Mr. Butler: This exchange is typical of the lobbying that has taken place, is taking place and will continue to take place for some months.

Western European Union

8. **Sir Anthony Meyer** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for strengthening the military role of the Western European Union in the defence of Europe.

Mr. Heseltine: We expect the reactivated Western European Union to give a valuable political impetus to improved European security co-operation. However, NATO remains the cornerstone of our security, and, as the modified Brussels treaty makes clear, WEU will not duplicate the military functions of NATO.

Sir Anthony Meyer: In view of the renewed French interest in WEU, is it not now the ideal framework within which to secure a better balance within NATO and to strengthen the role of European industry to provide weapons for the Alliance?

Mr. Heseltine: The provision of weapons systems is generally recognised to be a desirable objective for co-ordination, but it is more properly sought through the Independent European Programme Group, to which the Government are giving a great deal of attention. We certainly think that the recent discussions in Rome at the Western European Union were helpful and showed that there was a willingness and anxiety on the part of the Ministers participating to continue the momentum which that meeting began.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister agree that there is justification for a little hesitation about this matter, as most of the Europeans with an overwhelming interest in the reactivation of WEU are primarily concerned with the central area of NATO? For them there may be far less interest or significance in the southern and, more important for Britain, northern areas of NATO. Does the Secretary of State recognise the risk of a genuine strategic disadvantage for Britain?

Mr. Heseltine: There is a great deal in what the hon. Gentleman says. That is why I made it clear in my initial answer that NATO remains the cornerstone of our defence-security policies.

Mr. Hill: I am sure that my right hon. Friend, like me, welcomed the reactivation of WEU and the French initiative. Does he agree that it is absolutely essential that we do not lose sight of complete co-operation with the United States' Government and the Pentagon in this matter? Does he think that the United States' Government have welcomed the reactivation of WEU?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will recognise that his questions could easily trespass on the territory of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. However, I believe that the initiatives are broadly welcomed by the United States' Government. The essence of what we are seeking to do regarding industrial co-operation is to ensure that European industry is equipped with the same degree of resource and rationalisation to enable it to compete more effectively with and to keep abreast of advancing United States' technology.

Mr. Johnston: Regarding technical co-operation, does the Secretary of State think that the new French enthusiasm for WEU shows that France may be considering resuming her membership of NATO, and would he welcome that?

Mr. Heseltine: The House will realise that if I hesitate to speak on behalf of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, I shall hesitate even more profoundly to speak for France. France must decide what her motives are, and we must respond to initiatives. It seemed to us that there was an opportunity for profitable co-operation.

Mr. Stokes: Will my right hon. Friend consider following the example of his colleagues, the other European Defence Ministers, and contemplate addressing the WEU Assembly, so that we can hear directly from him and be proud to have a British Minister present?

Mr. Heseltine: I am most grateful for that kind thought, but it would seem appropriate for me to respond to invitations rather than to initiate them.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Is the Secretary of State aware that many hon. Members are worried that the reactivation of WEU could lead eventually to the creation of another military bloc? No one wants that. Does he agree that if it is necessary, as it is, to have a greater European voice in the defence of the West, it should come through NATO and not through the creation of another body?

Mr. Heseltine: The Government do not want to see the creation of another European bloc. That is why my initial answer was clearly designed to stress that NATO remains the cornerstone of our security. There is no profit for any of us, including WEU members, in fragmenting the defence efforts of Europe and our partnership with the North American people.

USA (Discussions)

9. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to hold discussions with representatives of the United States of America Government.

Mr. Heseltine: I have no plans to do so in advance of the NATO ministerial meeting in Brussels in December.

Mr. Lloyd: Does the Secretary of State realise how unsatisfactory his right hon. Friend's answer was to the question of my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) about the follow-on force attack? Would it not be appropriate for the Secretary of State to inform his American counterparts of the growing anxiety in this country and western Europe about the dangers, through follow-on force attack, of an early use of nuclear weapons? Will he advise the House whether there will be a debate on this important issue before 4 December, when the final decision will be made?

Mr. Heseltine: I found the answer of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces wholly convincing. If the Opposition are suggesting that in the event of warfare we should not be allowed to attack the airfields in the Soviet Union or their tanks before they mass and attack us, it shows a degree of naivety towards defence policy which exceeds even that which inflicted such a severe defeat on the Labour party at the general election.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: When my right hon. Friend meets the United States Government, will he stress the comparative weakness of the northern flank of the NATO Alliance and ask them to commit a greater element of naval support to that area in the event of an attack?

Mr. Heseltine: I am pleased to say that even in the past few days I have been able to have detailed discussions with my Norwegian and Danish colleagues who, of course, are aware of the concern of the whole Alliance to ensure that our defence spreads across the territory of NATO rather than any one specific part of it. Therefore, although we keep under constant review areas in which we think there may be a relative, though not an absolute weakness, they may be assured that we continue to do all that we can to maintain the credibility of our deterrence in all areas.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, as he has already told the House, follow-on force attack is not part of NATO's strategy, but that in December NATO will be asked to approve that strategy, which is at present basically a US army strategy, as NATO strategy? If such a decision is taken, will the right hon. Gentleman make a statement to the House, as it is an important shift in NATO strategy?

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Gentleman is far from keeping abreast of developments. On 9 November the NATO Alliance, through the Defence Planning Committee in permanent session, adopted the follow-on force attack policy, but the idea that there is something new in the concept that an alliance, if ever it found itself in hostile circumstances, should be allowed to strike deep in enemy territory is the most extraordinary abdication of defence capabilities.

Nuclear Weapons (Transportation)

10. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will institute an inquiry into arrangements for the safe transport of nuclear weapons by road.

Mr. Stanley: Like other aspects of nuclear safety, the arrangements for the safe transport of nuclear weapons remain constantly under review.

Mr. Janner: Is part of that review the exercise now known as Broken Arrow, one phase of which was recently carried out on Salisbury plain? If so, what is the involvement of police and fire authorities in such exercises, given that they would have to cope with the emergency caused by a disaster such as that which could have occurred when Chevaline nuclear warheads were carried through the city of Leicester in the rush hour?

Mr. Stanley: We cannot breach the long-established policy followed by successive Governments for security reasons of not confirming or denying the presence of nuclear weapons in any particular location. As I have assured the hon. and learned Gentleman in parliamentary answers, however, nuclear safety, including the safe transport of nuclear weapons, is constantly under review and very close attention is paid to it.

Sir John Farr: When answering questions about the transport of nuclear materials and weapons around the city of Leicester, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that Labour Members, including the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), would have us abandon entirely our own nuclear deterrent?

Mr. Stanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We are very much aware that the Labour party has embarked on a policy of one-sided strategic nuclear disarmament, which we have no intention of following.

Tornado Aircraft

11. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement on progress regarding the introduction into operational deployment with the Royal Air Force of the air defence variant of the Tornado.

Mr. Stanley: The first two Tornado F2s, the air defence variant, were delivered to RAF Coningsby last week and are being used for ground training and familiarisation. As planned, flying training for the operational conversion unit will start next year and the aircraft will enter squadron service in 1986.

Mr. Latham: In view of recent critical comments in the United States about Tornado, will my right hon. Friend stress its importance to the Western defence effort and the importance of the existing strike version?

Mr. Stanley: I am aware of the press reports to which my hon. Friend refers. I assure him that the RAF is extremely well satisfied with the capability and survivability of the Tornado. As for performance, it is significant that Tornado GR1s won two of the three major trophies in the recent Strategic Air Command bombing competiton staged by the United States air force.

Mr. Robert Atkins: Why do we allow Turkey to be an ally within NATO when the Government are not prepared to sell Tornado to that country?

Mr. Stanley: I do not think that my hon. Friend is entirely correct, but if my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement can add further to the information about the sale, I am sure that he will do so.

RAF Upper Heyford

12. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he anticipates that the noise level testings approximate to RAF Upper Heyford will be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: We expect to have computer predictions of noise levels in the vicinity of RAF Upper Heyford available by the end of the year. Validating measurements in the area will then be taken to confirm these. If they show that noise levels are above a qualifying level, my Department will introduce its standard noise insulation grant scheme.

Mr. Baldry: While those living near to Upper Heyford fully appreciate that one of the first duties of the Government must be the defence of the realm, is my hon. Friend aware that they are increasingly frustrated at the delay in knowing whether, and which, homes near to Upper Heyford will be eligible for a noise insulation grant? Will my hon. Friend and his Department make every endeavour to speed up these tests so that those who think they might be eligible for noise insulation grants can be informed as quickly as possible?

Mr. Lee: I understand my hon. Friend's concern. The RAF Institute of Community Medicine will be visiting the area early in 1985 to validate measurements. We are in regular correspondence with the Cherwell district council. Noise insulation grant schemes are already operating at Brawdy, Honington, Yeovilton and Leuchars, and three helicopter sites in Northern Ireland, and are under consideration at Cottesmore, Kinloss, Lossiemouth, Stornoway and, of course, Upper Heyford.

Chemical Weapons

13. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to meet the threat from the chemical weapons manufactured and held by the Soviet Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: We are continually improving our defensive equipment and clothing against chemical attack.

The Government are also doing their utmost to secure progress in achieving a comprehensive, verifiable and world-wide ban on the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons, together with the destruction of existing stocks, at the conference on disarmament in Geneva. We tabled important new proposals on verification in February and July this year.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend remind advocates on the Opposition Benches and in CND who are in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament by us that our unilateral abandonment of chemical weapons in the 1950s did not evoke a similar response from the Soviet Union? Is it not an irony that we now have to depend on the nuclear deterrent against the massive armoury of chemical weapons held by the Soviet Union?

Mr. Stanley: My hon. Friend is right. The massive Soviet procurement of chemical weapons is the most clear and eloquent illustration of the naivety of one-sided nuclear disarmament.

Mr. Robert C. Brown: Will the Minister continue to resist the blandishments of those on his Back Benches on the issue of chemical weapons? Will he assure the House that he will continue to see that Her Majesty's armed forces receive the best possible equipment to withstand any possible chemical attack?

Mr. Stanley: We are devoting many resources to improving our defensive equipment. There is no change in our policy, and we are working as constructively and earnestly as we can to achieve a world-wide ban on chemical weapons, which would be an enormous advance for mankind.

Trident Missiles

14. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent communications he has had about the proposal to base the Trident weapon in Scotland.

Mr. Heseltine: I have received a few letters from organisations and private individuals.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Secretary of State aware that, apart from a dwindling number of militant Tories, nobody in Scotland wants this terrorist weapon? In view of yesterday's announcement about increased prescription charges and cuts in overseas aid when people are starving to death in the Third world, why are the Government proposing to spend over £10,000 million on a weapon of death, instead of spending that amount of money on the preservation of human life?

Mr. Heseltine: The Government are to modernise the Polaris system by the introduction of Trident for the same reasons as the previous Government modernised Polaris with Chevaline. If the hon. Gentleman believes that there is overwhelming evidence of opinion in Scotland, he will, perhaps, take into account the evidence of the letters that I have received about Scottish opinion on this matter—one from the president of Strathclyde university students association, one from Streatham CND and three from members of the public, two of whom live in England.

Strategic Forces

15. **Mr. Home Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will report on the progress of his review of strategic forces.

Mr. Heseltine: I take it that the hon. Gentleman is inquiring about our strategic nuclear forces; and I can assure him that no review of our policy is under way.

Mr. Home Robertson: Are there any strategic circumstances under which Trident nuclear missiles in Britain could be used without the consent and approval of the United States Government?

Mr. Heseltine: There is no question of any consent being necessary.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 13 November.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I shall preside at a dinner in honour of President Koivisto of Finland.

Mr. Fatchett: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for that answer.

In her speech at the Guildhall last night the Prime Minister confessed that the rate of economic growth in the economy was not sufficient to cut the level of unemployment. Earlier in the day the Chancellor, in his autumn statement, offered no hope of any real cut in the level of unemployment. Are we to conclude from those statements that the Government have absolved themselves from responsibility for unemployment and for the plight of the unemployed?

The Prime Minister: No. If the hon. Gentleman looks in detail at what I said last night he will see that I pointed out that growth in Britain this year has been of the order of 2·5 per cent. It would have been 3·5 per cent. but for the coal strike. The 2·5 per cent. has been enough to create a considerable number of new jobs. But, because of the demographic curve that we have to face, it is not enough substantially to reduce, as we wish, the level of unemployment.

Mr. St. John-Stevas: Will my right hon. Friend take time in her busy day to have words with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is sitting not far away from her, and ask him whether he will have second thoughts about the proposed abolition of the £1 note? If she saves us from the imposition of the most unpopular coin in our history, she will have the support of virtually the entire country.

The Prime Minister: I cannot offer my right hon. Friend very much hope. The £1 note will have lasted for two years longer than might otherwise have been the case. During that time the £1 coin has become much more widespread in its use and much more accepted. As my right hon. Friend is aware, the £1 note lasts for only about nine to 10 months. A re-issue would cost some £3 million and we could find better use for that money.

Mr. Kinnock: The Government have cut overseas aid by £160 million in the past four years. Can the right hon. Lady tell us whether that cuts programme has now stopped, whether it is to continue, or whether, in the name of humanity, she will reverse that cuts policy, and reverse it now?

The Prime Minister: I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman any more information than is contained in this year's Autumn Statement, which he will notice is in precisely the same form as the previous statement in 1983. In other words, the budget for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration, was given as a global sum. He will see that the two Departments have precisely the same budget as was anticipated in the White Paper. It has not been increased; it has not been decreased. The total amount for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was £1,800 million in 1984-85 and it will be £1,870 million in 1985-86.

Mr. Kinnock: The hunger has not decreased at all. Is the Prime Minister not aware that this country feels that it has a moral responsibility and wants to discharge it? She is still dodging, just as the Chancellor of the Exchequer dodged yesterday and as the Minister for Overseas Development dodged last week. She is the Prime Minister. Cannot she tell us straight exactly what that budget is to be spent on? Are there any cuts, or is she just too ashamed to say?

The Prime Minister: No, Sir. The global budget is done at this time of the year, and within that total budget separate provision is made by the Foreign Secretary. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that last year aid was up on the previous year. In 1983-84 the total Foreign Office budget was £1,683 million. I do not have the precise aid figures, but the figure for the total Foreign Office budget has increased from £1,683 million to £1,870 million this year. I should make it quite clear that that aid budget has allowed us to respond to Ethiopia. There is no question but that we shall be able to respond in the future with humanitarian aid in the same way as we have just responded to Ethiopia.

Mr. Kinnock: That is a shameful answer from the Prime Minister and I do not think that the public or those engaged in trying to help the hungry will forgive her for it. Will she now reverse the cuts programme and discharge the responsibilities of a rich country to the poor of this earth?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is trying to detract from this country's excellent record of humanitarian aid. As he knows, this country led the world in providing aid to Ethiopia. He does not like that lead and is trying to detract from it. The budget for the Foreign Office will be quite sufficient to permit humanitarian aid of that kind in future.

Q2. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 13 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Atkins: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the great majority of people in my constituency, in the rest of Lancashire, and probably in the country for that matter, support the retention of corporal punishment in our schools? Is she further aware that the old adage "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is as true now as it ever was? Will she do all in her power to ensure that that element of discipline is retained in our schools?

The Prime Minister: I assure my hon. Friend that we do not intend to abolish corporal punishment in schools. As he knows, we have to respect the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, which made it perfectly clear that where the convictions of parents were otherwise, those convictions must be respected. We shall introduce legislation to honour that judgment.

Mr. Steel: Why should we trust in the Prime Minister's belief that her present policies will lead to a fall in unemployment when only last December she told us of her belief that the £1 note would be retained?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman reads exactly what I said, he will find that the £1 note will be retained for about two years longer than it would otherwise have been. Indeed, if he reads the very long letter that I wrote, he will find that—as I said in the House—

"there is no question of withdrawing the note for the time being. But equally, that may eventually be the right thing to do."

I do not think it right to spend another £3 million on a special extra print of £1 notes to last only nine or 10 months when that money could be spent on several other things.

Mr. Lester: I listened carefully to my right hon. Friend's answer about the Foreign Office budget. Will she take time today to inquire about what machinery would exist to deal with an adverse rate of exchange which affected that budget, as there is a commitment in the Gracious Speech to a substantial overseas aid programme and it is widely supported in all parts of the House?

The Prime Minister: The Foreign Office budget, including that for aid, is substantial. Most aid expenditure is in sterling and does not therefore suffer from exchange rate movements. We determine our aid in sterling and it is denominated in sterling in those countries to which we give it. The only exception is aid given under the Lomé convention, when European currency is used. Payments to the World Bank are also denominated in sterling.

Q3. **Mr. Pike** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pike: Only 35 per cent. of electricity was generated from coal in August and the CEGB has considerable additional costs. Can the Prime Minister say what those additional costs are? Can she give an assurance that they will not be passed on to the consumer, recognising that the dispute was provoked by the NCB, which did not use recognised procedures before proposing to close Cortonwood? Does she accept that the Government have taken no positive steps to help resolve this long dispute?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is aware that the Government neither wanted nor sought the dispute and did everything possible to avoid it. Generous pay offers, generous investment, generous voluntary redundancy, a guarantee of future employment and very generous subsidies of taxpayers' money were involved. We are talking of far more generous terms for the coal industry than many people who have to find the taxes for the coal industry receive.

If the CEGB is to go back to the amounts of electricity once generated from coal, it must be sure of security of supply. Failure to achieve security of supply loses customers more than anything else.

Mr. Terlezki: The NUM has taken millions of pounds to America — perhaps it would have been more appropriate for the money to be taken to Cuba or the Soviet Union. Would it not be better if that money were used to help the families of striking miners or for Ethiopia, about which the Opposition shed crocodile tears?

The Prime Minister: I can see my hon. Friend's point. I would take more notice of some right hon. and hon. Members of the Opposition if they did not support a strike to take an unlimited quantity from the taxpayer to support the coal industry.

Q4. **Mr. Parry** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Parry: Is the Prime Minister aware that further increases in gas, water and electricity prices will cause more hardship to pensioners and people on low incomes? Is she also aware that any further increase in prescription charges will deter people from seeking proper medical treatment, thereby causing more pain and suffering? Will the Prime Minister make it clear that she will totally oppose any cuts in overseas spending in the poorest countries, where millions are dying of starvation? If the so-called iron lady does not, she should be renamed the cruel lady.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add about the aid programme. Electricity charges have gone up by 2 per cent. in the last two years. Under the Labour Government they went up by 2 per cent. every six weeks. I remind the hon. Gentleman that 70 per cent. of prescriptions are free and that the prescription charge covers only about one third of the cost of the average prescription.

Mr. Butterfill: Will my right hon. Friend comment on reports in *The Standard* tonight about the GLC granting employment contracts to temporary and part-time employees knowing that the posts will disappear, resulting in the payment of £90,000 in compensation — [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Should people be granted compensation when they were appointed on a temporary basis only last July?

The Prime Minister: The actions speak for themselves and are yet another reason for the abolition of the GLC.

Mr. Pavitt: Does the the Prime Minister recall that during last year's less tragic Conservative party conference millions of television viewers heard her express concern about terminal cancer patients and the cost of prescriptions? How can she justify the rise in prescription charges last April to £1·60 each, or £26 a year for the long-term sick?

Will the right hon. Lady do something about the young woman with breast cancer who has to undergo chemotherapy? If the prescription charge rises to £2 she will have to pay that sum every three weeks, or about £30 a year for a season ticket, for the remainder of her life. Cannot the right hon. Lady do something about that rather than simply express concern?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is aware of the answer to his question. There is no special arrangement for terminal cancer patients. An obvious reason is that it is difficult to tell the patient that the illness is terminal, and that in some cases it is difficult to know that it is terminal. If such patients come within the exempted group for other reasons, their prescriptions will be free of charge.

House of Commons Stationery (Use)

3.31 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise a point about the actions of a senior Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who circulated, on House of Commons stationery, health authority members whom he perceived to be Labour party supporters. I put a note in the hon. Gentleman's pigeonhole earlier this afternoon but regret to note that he is not in the House. The circular was sent on 13 August and was addressed to all Labour members of health authorities. I believe that it was sent in postage-paid envelopes——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is the point of order for me?

Mr. Couchman: I believe that sending out such circulars on House of Commons stationery, in postage-paid envelopes, was an abuse of the rules relating to the use of stationery to which we are all subject.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman gave me notice of his point of order. It is the practice of the House for questions relating to the appropriate use of House of Commons stationery to be considered by the Services Committee, which drew up the rules that govern that matter. I shall ensure that the attention of the appropriate Sub-Committee is drawn to the hon. Gentleman's remarks, and no doubt that Sub-Committee will look into the matter.

Questions to Ministers

3.33 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During the last Session of Parliament you were kind enough to rule that questions to the Prime Minister should be directed towards her responsibilities. Today there have been two questions to the Prime Minister on matters outside her responsibilities. Would it be in order for you to repeat your edict?

Mr. Speaker: I shall gladly do so. Supplementary questions should always be related to the question on the Order Paper. There are 115 questions on the Order Paper today — the highest number ever — asking the Prime Minister to list her engagements. Some of the supplementary questions today were addressed to me rather than to the Prime Minister's engagements.

Mr. Rob Hayward (Kingswood): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It has been your stated intention since I have been a Member of Parliament to protect Back Benchers, especially during Prime Minister's Question Time. Are you aware that when my right hon. Friend was first elected as Leader of the Opposition she took 15 weeks to use 1,000 words to ask questions of the then Prime Minister? The current Leader of the Opposition has taken not 15 weeks, not 10 weeks, not eight weeks, but four weeks to use 1,000 words in questioning my right hon. Friend. Were it not for that verbosity factor of 375 per cent., two more Back Benchers could ask questions during each Prime Minister's Question Time.

Mr. Speaker: I am afraid that I have not carried out such detailed research. A dispensation has always been given to Front Bench spokesmen. I do my utmost to ensure that Back Benchers have an equal share of the time. When we begin a new Session, I start with a clean sheet for Prime Minister's questions. I hope that everyone will have his opportunity.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Are you aware that during defence questions the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) rose on no fewer than four occasions and spoke at great length? Would it not be a good idea to suggest that the right hon. Gentleman does not model himself on the verbosity of his leader?

Mr. Speaker: I think that it was five times. The choice rests entirely with the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), but I must remind the occupants of both Front Benches that every time a Front Bench spokesman rises a Back Bencher will fail to catch my eye.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the six motions on statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Dairy Produce Quotas (Amendment) Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1538) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Industrial and Commercial Ratepayers (Consultation) Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1355) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the National Health Service Functions (Directions to Authorities and Administration Arrangements) Amendment Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1577) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

[Mr. Speaker]

That the Bread and Flour Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1304) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments; &c.

That the Bread and Flour (Scotland) Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984, No. 1518) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Rating of Caravan Sites (Scotland) Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. —*[Mr. Lang.]*

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[SIXTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [6 November].

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament—*[Sir Paul Bryan.]*

The Economy

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition and his right hon. and hon. Friends. In addition, under the powers given to me by Standing Order No. 35, I have selected the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) and his right hon. and hon. Friends for a second Division at the end of the debate.

3.36 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I beg to move, at the end of the Question, to add:

But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech reaffirms policies which have already done severe damage to the British economy and will, in the future, further hold back the prospects of economic recovery.

At the end of the exchanges which yesterday followed the autumn statement on the economy the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) complained about what he called a slur which I had cast on the Government's reputation. The assertion to which he took such histrionic exception was my conclusion that unemployment was now not so much a consequence of Government policy but an integral part of it, planned, intended and essential to the present economic strategy.

If we assume, as we must, that the passion of the hon. Member for Suffolk, South was genuine, it was the product of one of two possible errors. The first possibility is that he does not know the meaning of "slur". The second is that he fails to comprehend the workings and the intentions of the medium-term financial strategy, which is the centrepiece of the Government's economic policy. Anyone who adopts that policy or supports it is, at the very least, accepting a high level of unemployment as a price that is worth paying for the achievement of other economic objectives.

I ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer a question which I asked him three weeks ago and which he singularly failed to answer on that occasion. Does he or does he not accept on behalf of the Government any responsibility for the present level of unemployment? It is not me alone who believes that the Government are guilty in this particular. I quote from yesterday's edition of *The Guardian* in which these words appeared:

"there does seem to be some slight difficulty in constantly lamenting the high level of unemployment while at the same time pursuing policies which drive it even higher."

That is the judgment of the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) and not the opinion of a radical leader writer. I note that the Chancellor laughs at the very mention of the right hon. Gentleman's name, but he was happy to serve in a Cabinet with the right hon. Gentleman when things were going rather better for him.

The Opposition's first charge against the Government is that the concept of their economic strategy is that high levels of unemployment are inherent within the policy which they pursue. Our second charge is that that policy ignores the real economy and concentrates instead on artificial and arbitrary financial targets which in the end become an object in themselves. Hence the fact that yesterday the Chancellor had the effrontery to claim some kind of victory because he had almost met the public expenditure targets which last year he had set for himself. He claimed that victory while the real world, outside the theoretical model which he has created, is depressed and moving into slump, in no small part because of the deflation that he has created by pursuing his public expenditure and money supply targets.

Let me once more quote from the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham. It is a quotation which was mentioned in part yesterday by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). It describes the present economic condition so perfectly that the full paragraph deserves an airing. The right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham said:

"there are nearly two million fewer people in employment than there were in 1979. Manufacturing production is still 12½ per cent. below its peak level in 1979. Though now rising, manufacturing investment is still 30 per cent. below 1979. Our non-oil trade has declined from a surplus of £500 millions in 1981 to a deficit of £7½ billion in 1983, and will probably be in deficit by over £10 billion this year."

That is a resumé by the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham of the economic success which the Chancellor describes, and it ends with a reference to the deficit of £7½ billion.

It was upon that basis that yesterday the Chancellor commented upon the balance of payments prospects. He said:

"We expect it to be in surplus by about £2½ billion next year."

He added:

"If a Labour Government had achieved anything like that, they would not have been able to believe their good fortune." —[*Official Report*, 12 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 420.]

"Good fortune" are exactly the right words to describe the position. Without North sea oil, a bonus which no other Government have enjoyed, our balance of payments would be in deep and chronic deficit, and yet the Chancellor brags of his balance of payments record which is wholly and completely dependent upon that gratuitous advantage.

I never cease to be amazed by the Chancellor's self-destructive willingness to say things on one day which are exposed as errors and distortions on the next. That typifies his comment upon his alleged balance of payments success. It typifies almost all he did yesterday. The BBC last night spoke of his "creative accounting". Today, the *Financial Times*, with magisterial understatement, observes that:

"Mr. Lawson's November utterances are hardly a reliable guide."

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Does the right hon. Gentleman regard his general election utterances as a reliable guide to the rate of inflation? It is of course one of the largest influences on the level of unemployment. Under his government and that of his colleagues, the rate of inflation was high and increasing; under the present Government the rate of inflation is low and decreasing; notwithstanding the right hon. Gentleman's predictions.

Mr. Hattersley: I suspected that one of the weaker-minded Back Benchers would return to the inflation prediction that I made during the general election. The Chancellor and I made seven economic predictions during the last general election. I was wrong about one and right about six; with the Chancellor the position is exactly the opposite.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): Give us them.

Mr. Hattersley: Let me give the right hon. Gentleman the obvious one—his promise that unemployment was about to fall. There is one problem with the Chancellor's unemployment forecasts — he makes them only at election time. When he makes them, they invariably turn out to be wrong.

It is highly undesirable for this country as a whole to possess a Chancellor of the Exchequer who is written about, as was the present Chancellor in this morning's newspapers, in terms of the managing and manipulation of statistics and the inability or unwillingness to tell the House of Commons the truth about his programmes. When the Government's economic policy is defended as it has been this week by the partnership of the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Employment, the problems of believing the Chancellor are even greater. The Secretary of State for Employment always addresses us as though he were the head boy at morning assembly — and then, after Tom Brown, we get Flashman. That attitude is revealed, as it was yesterday, in the Chancellor's comments about North sea oil. Next year, North sea oil revenues will amount to £11 billion, yet, despite that massive amount, they will total less than the cost to the Exchequer of the 3 million unemployed. The money will be wasted on financing unemployment rather than spent on increasing jobs.

There are two central serious arguments about the alternative ways of using North sea oil that should be explored by the House. The Opposition believe that the abandonment of exchange control combined with the effect of the Government-induced recession have encouraged far too much of the North sea income to be exported and invested in other countries' economies, jobs and industries and, therefore, invested in our unemployment. We believe also that the oil income should have been specifically used for the reinvigoration of the industry against the time when the oil revenues began to diminish —a reduction that almost certainly begins next year. Those are serious questions, yet the Chancellor's response on this subject to a question from the hon. Member for East Lindsey (Mr. Tapsell) is recorded in *Hansard*. The Chancellor said:

"He need not worry too much about North sea oil . . . for it will certainly see out his active life."

Mr. Lawson: Tell the full story.

Mr. Hattersley: A full stop followed the sentence that I read. The Chancellor stated:

"He need not worry too much about North sea oil . . . for it will certainly see out his active life."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 425.]

Mr. Lawson: Read on.

Mr. Hattersley: The Chancellor will not divert me from reminding him that, although that may be true in the case of the hon. Member for East Lindsey—although, after yesterday, we all certainly hope that it will not be—North sea oil will not last for the lives of this year's school leavers, 150,000 of whom are still unemployed.

Mr. Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): I point out to the right hon. Gentleman that if I reach the same age as my father and grandfather I shall be here for another 30 years.

Mr. Hattersley: I probably greet that news with more pleasure than the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I suspect that the Chancellor really mea . yesterday that North sea oil revenues will easily see out the life of this Government. His real concern is that his policies should be cushioned by that unusual boon and unique benefit.

Yet even with £11 billion of North sea oil revenue the Government both anticipate and plan for a permanent reservoir of 3 million unemployed. They use that pool of unemployment as a sort of incomes policy to hold down the total wage bill. They hope to use it as part of their attempt to emasculate the trade unions. That, on the evidence of the Chancellor's performance on "Weekend World" three weeks ago, is a major object of present Government policy.

Yesterday I pressed the Chancellor on unemployment prospects. I asked him whether the *Financial Times* was right to say that the Government Actuary hypothesised an increase of 400,000 in unemployment this year. In fact, the *Financial Times* was wrong. The new assumption for this year is that unemployment is 150,000 higher than was originally estimated in last year's autumn statement. But the real significance of the Government Actuary's work lies in his next statement, his assumption for 1985-86. The Government Actuary assumes that unemployment will remain just as high in 1985-86 as this year. There is to be no fall, reduction or improvement, just a steady grind on of unemployment at—even on the Government's phoney figures—3 million or more.

It is no good the Chancellor saying that the Government Actuary does no more than make assumptions. *[Interruption.]* "Conventional assumptions", says the Chancellor. The Chancellor is wholly dependent on those conventional assumptions being right. If they are not right, the entire public expenditure forecast on which the Government hypothesise their tax cuts is wrong. Those assumptions have to be right for anything that the Chancellor said yesterday to work out in practice next March or the March after.

The truth is—I think that the Chancellor would improve his reputation if he honestly admitted it—that the Government do not anticipate any reduction in unemployment in the foreseeable future. If I do the Chancellor or his colleagues less than justice by saying that, he can confound me at once by telling me when the fall in unemployment is anticipated. After all, he used to say that a reduction in unemployment would follow certainly, inevitably and automatically from a reduction in inflation and public borrowing. So I ask the right hon. Gentleman: How long do we have to wait? Did he and his colleagues make it clear five years ago when they first embarked on that policy that at the end of five years or more, far from the automatic and inevitable solution coming about, unemployment would be 2 million or more higher and there would be no reasonable prospect of its being reduced? Of course, they did not.

The country has not been told the hard truth that, despite all the fancy talk about controlling monetary growth and of the relationship between interest rates and the public sector borrowing requirement, the Government have held down inflation by collapsing the economy. Yet, as the hon. Member for East Lindsey reminded us, Japan and America thrive on budget deficits. As Conservative Members recall — or should recall — even this Government began a small, temporary but genuine recovery in 1982 by relaxing credit control, increasing the PSBR and, above all, extending public capital spending.

Yesterday the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) insisted that unemployment is most likely to be reduced

> "If that money is left in the hands of the taxpayers".—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 421.]

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on venturing far enough out of the backwoods to accept the need for a boost in demand. He joins those other notable progressive revolutionaries and Socialist theorists, the Confederation of British Industry and the *Daily Mail*, in demanding that more activity is injected into the economy as a direct result of Government policy. I ask the hon. Gentleman to take a further step and join the CBI and the *Daily Mail* in accepting that the best way to increase employment and reduce the unemployment about which the Government claim to be so concerned is for whatever funds that are available to be spent in the public sector, and particularly in capital programmes.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): The logic of the right hon. Gentleman's argument is that he believes that, if the Government spend, spend, spend on public projects, unemployment will disappear. Will he explain why that did not happen in France under President Mitterrand and why the previous Labour Government did not spend, spend, spend to bring down unemployment?

Mr. Hattersley: That is not the logic of my argument; that is the illogic of the hon. Gentleman's conclusion. The Opposition have not suggested that we can spend, spend, spend indefinitely, down to zero unemployment. We have suggested that other countries have demonstrated that by prudent investment in capital works unemployment will certainly be reduced.

I do not expect or ask the hon. Gentleman to take my word for that. I simply ask him to read some of the published texts. This is the subject in which he is supposed to be interested and on which he is an alleged authority. Let him read the work of the Institute of Fiscal Studies. If he disregards the institute because it is objective, unprejudiced and unbiased, let him read the work of the London Business School, once the Valhalla of monetarism.

Both those institutions agree that £1 billion spent on public works will create six times more jobs than £1 billion used to reduce taxation. That is the result of their detailed studies of the British economy. I do not know any reputable economist who argues with that, though I know some disreputable politicians who say that they would rather give the money away in tax cuts than reduce unemployment. However, I do not know one authority that

disregards or contradicts the formula produced by the London Business School and the Institute of Fiscal Studies.

Mr. Lawson: I do not agree with it.

Mr. Hattersley: Perhaps not, but I was talking about reputable economists.

I insist that the use of any surplus for job creation by investment in the public sector is exactly how any funds that the Government have available ought to be employed. By doing it that way, rather than simply increasing private consumption, the Government would reduce whatever dangers there might be of a deterioration in the balance of payments as a result of the deflation—a danger which largely results from the damage done by the Government to manufacturing industry over the past five years.

I am aware that when the upturn comes, under one Government or another, the Government will have left manufacturing industry in the worst position to meet an upturn that it has been in for the past 50 years.

I repeat that whatever surplus might be created ought to be used directly to generate jobs. Yet the Chancellor is determined to use any surplus that he can contrive to cut direct taxation. As he knows the alternatives and is determined to choose tax cuts, how can he claim, here or anywhere else, that his prime object, or even his serious intention, is to reduce unemployment?

I understand, in part, the political reasons why the Chancellor is determined to make some cuts in taxation. After all, he and his party were twice elected on the false prospectus that that would be done, and done quickly. Today annual taxation is £22·5 billion higher than it was in 1979. If the Chancellor achieves his objective of cutting income tax by £1·5 billion, he will have to reduce the overall tax burden by only another £21 billion to get it back to the level that he inherited from the Labour Government

It is not surprising that the Prime Minister confines her comments on the subject to income tax alone; nor is it surprising that she always defines the tax bill according to her immediate convenience. When the national insurance surcharge is reduced, it is a tax cut. When the national insurance contribution is increased, national insurance has nothing whatsoever to do with tax. We know, and every reputable economist confirms, that national insurance contributions are in effect a tax and that including them in the overall bill means that an extra £22·5 billion is taken out of the economy every year by the Government.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): If the right hon. Gentleman is so certain that national insurance is a tax, and a damaging tax, why was a surcharge imposed while his colleagues were in government, and why did he take no steps to remove it?

Mr. Hattersley: Not because it was not a tax. No Labour Minister would have made the feeble pretence that it was not a tax. The hon. Gentleman is entitled to argue that the surcharge was damaging to industry and undesirable, but that is not the point at issue. The surcharge was a tax when we imposed it and it is a tax when the Conservative Government abolish it; and so is every form of national insurance contribution.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): The right hon. Gentleman is confining his arguments to the volume of taxation. He does not refer to the rate of taxation, which is being reduced considerably. He ought to consider what happened in the 1984 Budget, when the largest number of people since 1948 were released from liability to tax; and he should also reconsider his own record.

Mr. Hattersley: If the hon. Gentleman wishes me to comment on the distribution of taxes, I will say that, over the past five years, the richer the taxpayer, the bigger the volume of tax relief he has enjoyed. I am sure that my hon. Friends would be delighted for me to expand on that significant observation on the distribution of tax relief.

Last week the Prime Minister made selective claims about reducing income tax. She used to be the high priestess of monetarism and the personification of the cliché "There is no other way". Last week, after her temporary desertion of the Chancellor — and he only damages his reputation further by denying it—there was speculation about a U-turn.

Mr. Lawson: The right hon. Gentleman should have heard my right hon. Friend last night.

Mr. Hattersley: The Chancellor says that I should have heard the Prime Minister last night. Is he telling me that he did not want a bigger cut in the housing programme and that the Prime Minister did not fail to support him in that?

Mr. Lawson: I was concerned, as I always have been and as previous Chancellors have been, with achieving a particular total of public expenditure, and that total was achieved.

Mr. Hattersley: In other words, "I was right". There has been much speculation—since the event which the Chancellor has by implication confirmed — that the Prime Minister is undergoing a change of heart, that there is to be a U-turn and that she is about to distance herself from monetarism. The situation was likened by the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham in *The Guardian* yesterday to the Narvik debate, with the right hon. Lady playing the part not of Churchill but of Chamberlain.

I can reassure the Chancellor, however, that all the whispers about dumping him are premature. For the time being, the Prime Minister will continue to posture as a conviction politician, and the poor and the unemployed will pay the price of her convictions. However, the conscience of the country is beginning to stir at the thought of high, prolonged and intentional unemployment. Some Conservative Back Benchers have caught the mood already — for instance, the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox), who spoke on the first day of the debate on the Queen's Speech, and many others who have spoken in a similar vein during the past four days. Eventually, for electoral purposes, the Prime Minister will catch the same mood. Eventually she will lower her voice and say that unemployment is a scourge that, given a chance, she will eradicate. She has had the chance and has refused wholly to take it. She will not be forgiven.

4.5 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): Yesterday, I was able to outline in my autumn statement an outlook which is in many ways encouraging. We have the prospect of stable public expenditure in line with our long-term plans, inflation edging still lower, still lower interest rates, strongly rising investment and scope for reducing further the burden of taxation and leading to

[Mr. Nigel Lawson]

sustained economic growth and a rising level of employment for our people. I want to make it quite clear that the Government are doing and will be doing all that they can to create the conditions for a reduction in unemployment.

The prospect to which I have referred has been made possible because, among other things, we have stuck firmly to the promises that we made at the time of the general election. The planned total public expenditure of £132 billion in 1985-86 — which I was seeking and which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary sought during the public expenditure round—is in line not just with last year's White Paper but with the figures set out in the White paper published before the 1983 general election. Indeed, when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister declared that we stood on the plans published for all to read in the public expenditure White Paper, that is precisely what we did. The public expenditure figures for 1985-86 printed in the autumn statement yesterday are the very public expenditure totals on which we fought and won the general election.

In our first Parliament, we had the crucial priority of bringing down the unsustainable level of Government borrowing which we had inherited from the Labour Government of which the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was a rather stout pillar. That excessive borrowing not only fuelled inflation but drove up interest rates and represented a burden of deferred taxation which, sooner or later, would have to be paid. We achieved our objective of bringing down the borrowing requirement. We repaid all the foreign debt which we inherited from the Labour Government and reduced the annual level of Government borrowing to a more reasonable proportion of our gross domestic product.

In this Parliament, our fiscal priority can shift to the reduction and reform of taxation. That process began in the 1984 Budget when I laid out a structure of company taxation to endure for the rest of this Parliament and beyond. In that Budget we also began the process of tax reduction. The process had been initiated in the 1983 Budget by my right hon. and learned Friend the present Foreign Secretary. Personal allowances were raised substantially in excess of the rate of inflation, and that took many hundreds of thousands of people out of the income tax system entirely and reduced the poverty trap and the "why work?" syndrome.

The main target for our first round of cuts was the final elimination of the national insurance surcharge. It has frequently been described as Labour's tax on jobs. We remember that it was strongly advocated by the Liberal party when it was a member of the Lib-Lab pact.

Mr. Richard Wainwright (Colne Valley): Is the right hon. Gentleman unable to conceive that in the utterly different circumstances of full employment a beneficial tax can turn to a curse when unemployment reigns?

Mr. Lawson: Circumstances are always completely different in the hon. Gentleman's eyes. I must remind him that there was not full employment then.

The final abolition of the pernicious surcharge took effect only on 1 October this year. Thus, jobs have been free of tax for precisely 44 days—scarcely enough time to assess the benefits of abolition. The tax changes that I announced in this year's Budget have their full effect in 1985-86. Thus, there is already built into the system a tax cut of some £1·75 billion next year. The fiscal adjustment that I described yesterday, with the necessary qualifications, gives the prospect of scope for net tax cuts in the next Budget of a further £1·5 billion.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook seemed to accuse me of being interested in statistical manipulation and inaccurate forecasts. His problem is that he always looks on the dismal side of the economy, in regard not merely to unemployment—which worries us all—but to all other aspects, even when things are going well. For example, I looked back at his reaction to last year's autumn statement, when he strove to cast doubt on my forecast for investment. I have the relevant copy of *Hansard* with me in case he would like me to read from it. He declared that all of the commentators agreed that I was far too optimistic. I was forecasting that investment would rise by 4 per cent. in the current year. With the bulk of the year now behind us, it is clear that investment is likely to be up, not by 4 per cent., but by 7½ per cent. I apologise to the House for my undue pessimism last year.

In regard to the manipulation of statistics, the right hon. Gentleman is something of a rascal as he is always striving to make comparisons between the record of the Government in which he served and that of the present Government by taking the growth of output during the Labour Government's years from the first quarter of 1974, which was unusually low as a result of the adverse effects of the three-day week, to the second quarter of 1979, when it was artificially high reflecting the recovery from the winter of discontent. Any reputable economist, to the use the right hon. Gentleman's phrase, knows full well that a correct comparison is between the calendar years 1973 and 1979, which avoids the strike complications and takes the period between the two peaks of the business cycle. We shall do that and take the equivalent six-year period from 1979 to the forecast in the autumn statement for 1985.

During the six years from 1973 to 1979, under the Labour Government, gross domestic product rose by 8 per cent. The forecast that was published yesterday shows a level of output in 1985 of nearly 8 per cent. higher than the 1979 level. In other words, taking broadly equivalent six-year periods, the growth of output is virtually the same. However, the right hon. Gentleman made it clear that we should take no notice of North sea oil in our calculations. Excluding North sea oil, growth in output between 1979 and 1985 goes down to 5½ per cent. If we exclude North sea oil from the Labour years 1973-79, GDP rose by only 3½ per cent.

I agree that the world has changed. There has been a world recession, as some hon. Members are aware. However, between 1973 and 1979, when British output rose by 8 per cent., output in France rose by 20 per cent. and output in Germany rose by 15 per cent. In other words, their output was growing at least twice as fast as ours. The comparison with other European countries is much better for 1979-85. On the basis of the latest OECD forecast for France and Germany and the autumn statement, output will have risen at roughly the same rate in the United Kingdom as in France and Germany. If anything, it has grown faster in Britain. Europe has experienced difficulties in the past few years, yet the United Kingdom's growth performance in relative terms has improved beyond all recognition.

The right hon. Gentleman is also worried about employment. Although I am glad to say that employment is rising strongly, it has fallen in the past five years. That must be seen against the background of performance in the years 1973-79. The only reason why employment did not fall sharply during that period was that productivity grew appallingly slowly. Excluding North sea output, it grew by only 2 per cent. in six years. By 1979, hidden unemployment and overmanning was massive. As many Opposition Members would now agree, that represented hidden unemployment which was bound to emerge sooner or later. Productivity growth since 1979 has had to make up the ground that was lost during the 1970s. Since 1979, manufacturing productivity growth in the United Kingdom has been faster than in either France or Germany. Recapturing the lost productivity has been a painful experience, but it has been absolutely necessary if a basis is to be laid for improved efficiency and jobs in the future.

Inflation has also improved dramatically. During the period 1973-79, inflation averaged almost 16 per cent. compared with an OECD average of 10 per cent. During the past five years, inflation has averaged less than 10 per cent. and has now stabilised below 5 per cent.—roughly in line with the OECD average.

Mr. Hattersley: If we are contending statistical veracity, the House will want to be reminded that the Chancellor has compared two six-year periods. The Labour period that he has chosen began before the Labour Government were elected, let alone had had any effect on the economy. The Conservative period that he has chosen ends up not with fact but with forecasts. The first lesson of statistics is not to compare fact with forecast unless one is trying to cook the books.

Mr. Lawson: As I reminded the right hon. Gentleman by quoting my investment forecasts — I could have quoted others — my record on forecasting has been modest. In the event, reality has been better.

The right hon. Gentleman argues that our only recovery was in the wake of measures to stimulate demand in anticipation of the general election. He is completely wrong. Growth has averaged 2¾ per cent. per annum since the trough of the recession in 1981. It would have been 3½ per cent. this year, had it not been for the coal strike. That growth has been due in large measure to lower inflation and lower interest rates, not to a short-lived fiscal stimulus which would all too soon have been dissipated in higher inflation. The right hon. Gentleman wants just that sort of fiscal stimulus. Once again, he has offered the House a remedy that he acknowledges is incredible and discredited —a dose of reflation. It is true that, before the election, he was a professional reflationist. He believed that public spending was the cure for all ills. Accused by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister of wishing to solve all problems by pouring public money over them, he said, "I plead guilty to that charge."

One month after the election the right hon. Gentleman made a sincere and praiseworthy effort to go straight. He admitted:

> "Labour's economic policy — the promise to put Britain back to work — was a net vote loser. Nobody believed that Labour's theories could be put into practice. Labour's vague hopes of achieving growth through Government spending were barely understood and rarely believed."

The right hon. Gentleman continued:

> "The idea of borrowing to expand proved crucially unpopular. The British people—not being stupid—realised that the whole strategy lacked two essential ingredients: a coherent plan for investment and a scheme to combat inflation."

Alas, the right hon. Gentleman could not go straight for long. He is a reflationary recidivist — a habitual offender. He was back at it again today, offering the old reflationary package.

Does the right hon. Gentleman imagine that the House will accept what the British people—not being stupid—have already firmly rejected? He is not content with insulting the House by offering us a policy in which he does not believe, at least for part of the time. He went on to denounce the approach in which he now believes. He now denies that excessive wages price people out of work —I voiced that proposition in an earlier debate—and that wage moderation could price more of our jobless back into work. Yet he believes in an incomes policy. What is the point of an incomes policy if it is not to price people into work? The right hon. Gentleman accuses us of using high unemployment to curb wage inflation. As usual, he is totally wrong. We do not want high unemployment to curb wages, but we want to curb wages to reduce unemployment.

Mr. Hattersley: I have waited for some time for an opportunity to explain to the Chancellor two distinctions which sooner or later he must understand. I support the view that while a Labour Government reflate the economy and create expansion, there must be an agreement with the trade unions that ensures that that expansion and reflation are used to create new jobs. The distinction between that agreement at a time of reflation and expansion, and the pretence, at a time of slump, that anything can be achieved by lower wages is total and absolute. It is astonishing that the Chancellor cannot tell the difference.

Mr. Lawson: It is astonishing that the right hon. Gentleman is unaware that this is a time not of slump but of economic recovery with high unemployment. That view is echoed by the CBI, which he cited in his remarks as a great authority. The right hon. Gentleman has his work cut out for him in convincing some of his hon. Friends of the virtues of his incomes policy. I should like to know when it becomes the official policy of a united Labour party.

The right hon. Gentleman knows that wage moderation can generate more jobs. Indeed, it is the right way to generate jobs. The recent CBI survey conducted by Gallup provided telling confirmation of that. It showed that the one factor that a sizeable proportion of all firms believed would lead them to take on more employees was moderation in pay.

The House will have noticed that the right hon. Gentleman was unusually reticent about one important development: the miners' strike. He must know that it was wholly unnecessary, pursued by evil means, in pursuit of impossible demands and for political ends. No Government of any political party could concede to the demands of Mr. Arthur Scargill. The right hon. Gentleman knows that the strike has wrought untold damage on the industry, riven communities asunder, destroyed jobs in the industry's suppliers and, through its effects on interest rates, damaged employment prospects throughout the economy. Yet throughout, the dispute has been backed and, therefore, unnecessarily prolonged by the Labour party. *[Interruption.]* I am referring to resisting the strike. The country can judge where its priorities lie.

[Mr. Lawson]

The right hon. Gentleman spoke eloquently about the compassion that he and his party feel for the poor and the unemployed. I am certain that those feelings are sincere, although I regret that he is unlikely to acknowledge that all Conservative Members fully share the same feelings. I am certain that his compassion is genuine, although he offers the unemployed a remedy in which he does not believe, although he now denounces the one approach which he formerly proclaimed as vital, and although he feels compelled to back a strike which has grievously aggravated the problem. But I am also certain that the poor and the unemployed will not thank him or his party for a compassion which stops short of reasoned analysis and credible policies.

It is impossible to expect any consistency from the right hon. Gentleman. He publicly proclaimed:

"whatever policy the London Party stands on at the next election, I will support it."

The man of principle!

Today, the right hon. Gentleman proposed the very policies which were tried when his party was in government and found wanting. They were tested, and failed. They gave us high public spending and borrowing, high taxation, high inflation, high rates of interest and rising unemployment. Our policies, however, have been shown to lead to growth, as we said they would. We said that we would bring inflation down, and we have. We said that lower inflation would lead to growth, and it has. We said that with growth would come new jobs, and they have.

None of that would have been possible without first bringing down inflation. Nevertheless, we have always recognised that low inflation is not enough. We also need policies to reawaken the spirit of enterprise, to spread ownership and to fashion new attitudes about the creation of wealth. Much of our effort has concentrated on the small business sector of the economy, and for good reason. Britain is short, relatively speaking, of small companies compared with the United States and our major European competitors. The number of new businesses is a fair barometer of the vigour of enterprise in an economy. Today we suffer from a lack of new businesses which should have been created a decade ago. By now they would have been sizeable enterprises, which would continue to expand and create jobs. Their absence is a key feature of today's unemployment picture.

The recent CBI Gallup survey confirms that view. The results reveal a particularly optimistic attitude among small companies about the prospects for new employment. Those companies, above all, see themselves as needing to take on new employees in the year ahead.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): In view of the fact that the Government are basically responsible for the wholesale destruction of large enterprise, is it not clear that the only chance of their making progress is through small businesses? The Government are not doing particularly well in that direction either.

Mr. Lawson: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman, who often has more sensible contributions to make than the Labour Front Bench, which he once adorned, agrees with me about the importance of small businesses.

The Government's economic policies are designed to facilitate the creation of wealth and jobs. We have not hesitated to provide encouragement through the tax system where the circumstances demanded it. The business expansion scheme was introduced by my predecessor. It greatly extended and improved the earlier business start-up scheme, which was inaugurated in 1981. We have been monitoring the results of the business expansion scheme. Final figures are not yet available, but the picture that is emerging for the first year of the extended business expansion scheme—1983-84—is most encouraging.

The House will be glad to know that we estimate that at least £75 million, and probably more, was raised by small businesses under the scheme in 1983-84. More than 10,000 investors have put their money into more than 400 small companies. Inevitably, the sums raised have varied enormously. About 30 per cent. of companies each raised £50,000 or less. About 60 per cent. raised between £50,000 and £250,000. A few raised more than £1 million each. Particularly encouraging is the fact that well over half the total amount invested—at least £41 million—went to young, or very young, start-up companies. The rest went to more mature, but still relatively small, companies.

The purpose of the scheme is to encourage new and expanded activity in the small firms sector, which is so vital as a source of new jobs and prospects. The full results of the survey will be published fairly shortly. One of the most important features of the scheme is that the investor, even if he invests his money through a trust, becomes the direct owner of shares in the company in which his money is invested. That gives him a direct interest in the way in which the company is managed. It means that the company can benefit from an informed and active body of shareholders who can assist the management in the effort to expand and to create more jobs.

Throughout the Conservative Government's period of office the importance of direct ownership has been a constant theme. We have enabled an extra 1·75 million people to become owners of their own homes, so that the proportion of home ownership is now more than 60 per cent. The expansion of home ownership has aroused a much broader interest in the whole concept of owning, and the privatisation programme has helped to satisfy that new demand. Whenever we have moved a company from state control to the private sector, we have provided the employees with shares on special terms. The response has been enormous. The great majority of employees have accepted the offers and become shareholders in their own companies. Owning shares has given the workers a new sense of identity of interest with their companies and a new incentive, and companies that have moved back into the private sector have invariably performed better as a result.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): Jaguar?

Mr. Lawson: Yes—Jaguar, too.

The result has been that the work force is now able to participate directly in the success of the company. The interest in sharing in the ownership of major companies goes far beyond the companies' employees. It is interesting to note, for example, that British Telecom has already handled 1 million or more telephone calls requesting information about or expressing interest in the sale.

Even outside the privatisation programme the Government have been willing to use the tax system to stimulate acquisition of shares. That, too, has been

remarkably successful. When we came to office there were fewer than 30 profit-sharing schemes in the whole of British industry. Today, there are 788—more than 25 times as many — and there are many more in the pipeline. Since 1979, more than half a million employees have benefited from approved schemes.

The result of all those changes has been to create in business managements and work forces a whole new set of attitudes far removed from the "them and us" confrontation that has bedevilled this country for far too long. Employees know that the success of their business is linked with their own efforts and that their efforts determine their rewards. That spirit has lain crushed for many years beneath Government economic planning, penal taxation and incomes policies of the type still advocated by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook and the minority that he leads. Today that spirit is reawakened. Better motivation means higher profits, faster expansion and more jobs. It is, of course, a long-term policy.

Mr. Hattersley: How long?

Mr. Lawson: There is no short-cut. The Government's economic strategy is to create an enterprise economy that will produce prosperity and jobs for our people. The recovery is strong, the strategy is on course, and the policy will succeed.

4.33 pm

Mr. James Callaghan (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Like others, I wish to speak about the gloomy prospect of higher unemployment and fewer jobs. Mass unemployment is a cancer, the long-term effects of which cannot be neasured. One thing, however, we know: the lost years for young men and women cannot be replaced or overtaken. Therefore, I do not share the satisfaction of the Chancellor and the Prime Minister that the economy is in good shape. Indeed, it was perhaps a measure of the Chancellor's own uncertainty that he spent so long abusing the Labour Government. Listening to the right hon. Gentleman, one would scarcely believe that the Conservative party has been responsible for our affairs for nearly 10 of the past more than 14 years. If responsibility is to be allocated, by far the greater part must fall to the extended period of office of the right hon. Gentleman and his predecessors.

The Chancellor's selection of statistics is so brazen that one watches with admiration to see to what dizzy height he will jump next. The figures that he selects and the way in which he puts them are not an insult to the House because we all see through him and we all like him and admire his agility in these matters, but they do nothing for the intellectual level of the debate that he is leading. I do not intend to bandy figures. I shall come to my conclusion straight away so that the argument can be put to rest.

In my view, the Conservative Government have done better than the Labour Government on inflation and productivity but the Labour Government did better than the Conservative Government on employment and growth. That seems to me to be about as fair an assessment as one can make. But that is not what the Chancellor came to power for. He came to power to reverse the long-term secular decline of Britain's economy and he has failed to do that. That is the measure not of the condemnation of the right hon. Gentleman—that can follow at any time —but of the problem that the country still faces. So long as the right hon. Gentleman goes on trying to shuffle off responsibility for what was not done by the Labour Government 10 years ago he will fail to face the fact that the economy is still going backwards compared with our competitors. If we carry on as we are and North sea oil begins to fade we shall sink into a shabby genteel penury in the next 20 years. That is the measure of the task facing the Chancellor and he should address himself to it today rather than harking back to some misplaced balance sheet and comparing the present situation with what happened between 1974 and 1979.

I give one illustration of what I mean. The Prime Minister said last week—I believe that the Chancellor has said the same in the past—that private investment in manufacturing industries is improving and is now 15 per cent. higher than it was a year ago. That is welcome so far as it goes, but it does not go very far. I am delighted that private investment in manufacturing industry is 15 per cent. higher than it was a year ago, although none of us can say how much of that is due to the fact that there is to be a change in the capital allowance system, which must certainly be helping to accelerate some of the new investment. Rather than trying to delude the House with that statistic, however, the Prime Minister should look further back. I make the comparison with the Labour Government merely to show the continuing decline, which is a national problem.

New investment in manufacturing is not 15 per cent. higher than it was when I was in office. It is not even the same. It is 26 per cent. lower than it was in 1979. To put it another way, for every £100 spent on new, up-to-date plant and machinery in 1979 only £75 is being spent now. I believe that that failure is beginning to be reflected in our capacity to export manufactured goods of the type and quality required if we are to maintain our place among the foremost industrial nations. I believe that it was partly for that reason that, as we all know only too well, in 1983 we made a loss on our trade with other countries, if not for the first time in our history, certainly for the first time since the end of the war. That is something on which the House must concentrate, because this is where our future lies. At the moment, we are depending on North sea oil to keep us afloat, but our manufacturing industry is moving backwards by comparison with others, and also absolutely.

Another factor, which is too lightly dismissed, illustrates our economic difficulties. Again, I must put it personally. When I left the office of Prime Minister, a traveller going to the United States could get $2·5 for his pound, while today he gets $1·26. We are told that this helps exports, but, although it helps the export of some of the traditional goods for which we have been famous, it does not help our imports because it increases their prices.

My major point is that the Government, after nearly six years, still have to convince us not whether they are better or worse than the Labour Government, but that they are able to reverse the long-term secular decline that, if it continues, will mean that in 20 years' time this country will be ranked among the developing countries instead of among the advanced industrial countries.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the ominous realisation is affecting more and more observers of the total scene that, in reality, this country needs billions of pounds to be invested in productive new assets, both in the public and private sectors, and this is still not taking place?

Mr. Callaghan: I agree. The hon. Gentleman has anticipated the point that I would have made, although perhaps not as elegantly as he has. What worries me about this—and it must concern us all—is that the country is now, and increasingly unless we break out of the vicious circle, trying to maintain first-class social services on the back of a second-class economy, and we shall fail to do it. We shall have a gradual and slow decline.

We need a sustained improvement in competitiveness. I see no reason to depart from the general line that I pursued when I had responsibility for these matters, and I say nothing now that is different from what I said then. As the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Wainwright), the spokesman for the Liberal party, said, when today we have a much larger, under-used volume of resources of manpower skills and under-used machinery than at any time since the 1930s, we should do more to help ourselves. That is the point that the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) was also making. Higher productivity must come about and will lower labour costs per unit, but so will higher production in many cases. The Government need to change their policies to achieve this domestically, so that we can get higher production through the measures that have been set out already, and they should use their influence internationally to achieve the same ends.

The world has not yet recognised that the debt of the developing countries is the result of a broader global disequilibrium. Several million jobs in the modern industrial western world are dependent on exports to the Third world. As many as one in six of the jobs in the United States are so dependent. Import reductions by these countries, which are taking place under the influence of the International Monetary Fund, to try to put their economies straight and offset their deficits create unemployment in our countries. We must follow policies in trade and aid that will enable debtor countries to increase their foreign exchange earnings. Last year, interest payments on old loans from the developing countries to the western world were $50 billion to $60 billion in total, with the result that there was a net transfer from the developing countries to the western industrialised countries of some $20 billion across the exchanges from the poorest to the richest countries.

We must—this is where the Government should use their influence internationally — recommit the world's economic system to growth to permit a net flow of resources to developing countries and not from them. In that way, we shall both help them to overcome their dreadful poverty and help ourselves with more jobs. I do not disguise the fact that the problem is immense, and every Government have so far failed to solve it.

We are now faced with the technological revolution that has come upon us fast. A few days ago I was in Japan. With typical thoroughness, the Japanese have set up an institute of strategic research, whose purpose is to investigate, and report on, the economic and social consequences to their society of the technological changes, and what will be involved in the new, high-density communication prospects and the processing of new materials and other methods. I suggest that the Government should begin to do the same and take a broad strategic look at this problem, not just in isolation but in conjunction with other European countries. I see no prospect at the moment of any large-scale reduction in unemployment. Indeed, I fear the reverse.

I come now to the mishandling of the miners' strike. The Chancellor referred to this, and said that the Opposition should have made more reference to it. It drags on week after week, with both sides intent on a complete victory by a knockout, irrespective of the damage and suffering that they inflict. There have been negotiations in the course of which the National Coal Board has given some ground, notably to the NUM at Edinburgh, while in the settlement with the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers, the board shifted its position favourably towards the miners. However, we are now told by both sides that negotiations are at an end.

I was taught that the essence of negotiation was to carry one's case to the point at which one could go no further, to recognise when one has got all that could be wrung out of one's opponents, and to leave oneself a way out so that at the end one could settle honourably and live to fight another day. I do not think that either side in the present dispute gets high marks on those tests. However, the miners are a special breed of men. Danger, loyalty and dogged determination are their lifeblood. Consider what happens when there is a pit disaster. Those of us who watched the rescue work at Aberfan will never forget the way in which the men flocked to undertake the most dangerous and difficult tasks to rescue the children and others who were buried. During the last war they volunteered for the services in such numbers that Ernest Bevin had to hold them back.

I understand Mr. Scargill's pride in the miners, even when it leads him, wrongly, to fail to condemn acts of violence and intimidation, but whatever recent events may have done to influence public opinion, the country is fortunate to possess a breed of men, and their wives, with this stubborn determination and loyalty. We have needed them in the past and we shall need them in the future. They must never feel alienated or deserted, and I shall support their struggle to maintain the life of their villages and their pride in their communities.

Two steps are now necessary, one by the Government and the other by the miners' leaders. First, I beg the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and other Ministers to change their tone and to acknowledge the value of the men who are on strike as much as they acknowledge the value of the men who are at work. Both are equally deserving of an appreciation of the kind of men they are. If the Conservative party can never understand that, it will never solve these industrial problems.

There is a value in all miners, whatever view they have taken. It is the same stubbornness and loyalty that demands that some of them stay at work while others will not go back. Whether they are at work or on strike, I value them all. The minority possess the same qualities as those who are on strike, and we should not separate one group from the other.

However, the Government should acknowledge, clearly and precisely, in a way that they have not done yet, that the offer of large redundancy payments is not enough to revive the communities where a pit closure could bring disaster. There should be cast-iron guarantees about the programme for replacing old pits with new pits in some of the areas that will be worst affected, when new pits have been talked about but are still largely in the air. For example, it is not yet believed finally in south Wales that the new pit that has been talked about for so long will be brought into action. There must be cast-iron guarantees.

I have read the 1974 "Plan for Coal" two or three times recently because so many references have been made to it. It is couched in such general terms that it is not possible to pin everything upon the precise interpretation of every word in it. There must be a revised "Plan for Coal" which gives coal a large place in our future energy programme, as the Government say they wish. But the Government should go even further. They should sponsor exceptional and imaginative measures to offer new jobs and new hope to pit areas faced with closures so that the communities can see a clear way ahead.

The second step is for the miners' leaders to take. They must not permit the miners' exceptional loyalty and dogged resistance to be dissipated and drained away by a ragged break in their ranks. If the leadership comes to the conclusion that no more can be gained than has been already won, they have the responsibility to say that to their members and then to put it to the test of their members' opinions. If the decision goes in favour of acceptance, they will all march back together, united, with their heads held high, in an orderly and disciplined manner. That is the way for our miners and for our Government to behave. It would then be the responsibility of everyone in the House to hold the Government and the National Coal Board to their pledges to ensure a future for all those wonderful and worthy communities.

I fear that on the economic side the Government have much more to do before they can say that they have changed Britain's attitude and that we are making our way forward rather than backward. I fear also that in trying to understand the psychology of many groups of our people the Government still have much to learn.

4.51 pm

Mr. Francis Pym (Cambridgeshire, South-East): This afternoon we have had a characteristically robust performance from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and an equally characteristic performance from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). However, the rerun of yesterday has not added a great deal to the knowledge that the House already has.

I do not intend to follow the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) in his comments on the miners' strike, but I shall seek to follow him in the longer view of events which he took at the beginning of his speech.

I want to put my remarks into the broad context of the Gracious Speech, which is the subject of this debate. As the House knows, that speech is never written as a good read. It is just a programme for a Session. There are some good measures in this one and some highly controversial measures, but it is only concerned with this Session. Yet this is the second Session of this Parliament and therefore a highly significant one in the Government's unfolding strategy over the five years.

The Gracious Speech tells us little about that strategy. The only sentence that relates to it that I can find says:

"my Government will continue their policies of exposing state-owned businesses to competition and, where appropriate, returning them to the private sector."

The process of privatisation is a continuing theme of the Government, which I fully support. But I cannot detect anything else in the speech that I would put in the strategic category. There is, of course, firm control of Government spending, but that is a sine qua non anyway.

The speeches of my right hon. Friends from the Front Bench—all admirable speeches—also told us little of the broad strategy, although that of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was an exception. The other speeches from the Treasury Bench have dealt essentially with short-term issues, with reference in some cases to the medium term. This afternoon I want to urge upon the Government the necessity for thinking more positively and constructively about the long term. I want them to look further ahead with more imagination. I want to press them to anticipate future trends and developments more carefully and to prepare people for the changes that will come anyway. I want the Government to adjust their policies, including their economic policy, to take account of changing conditions and new opportunities, and to to stick too rigidly to their original decisions.

Let me give some recent examples of where I observe a failure to look ahead.

My party was committed to the abolition of rates and their replacement with a fairer system. About two years ago that commitment was abandoned when it was discovered that there were no alternatives that were not worse or impossible. What happened? No preparations were made for the consequences of that conclusion. No alternative plans were looked for. We got an ad hoc measure — rate capping. Yet we all know that the present system of local government finance was and is haywire. What should have happened was the immediate start of a process leading to a major reform of local government finance. That did not happen until last month. That suggests that the Government had not thought the matter through and had reacted much too late.

Debates in the House last Session revealed profound anxiety about the state of local government and the scale of Government interference. The Government seemed impervious to all those voices and tried to hold the line that all was well. It was not and it is not. Now, belatedly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has concluded that:

"we need a clear and dispassionate study not only of the abuses but of the underlying changes which those abuses reflect."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 134.]

It would have been better to think all that through before embarking on highly controversial legislation.

Those are examples from the recent past. A current example is the welfare state and its future development. I want to say at once that I welcome the extra funding that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was able to announce yesterday. For some time three things have been obvious about the welfare state. First, there have been enormous changes between the Beveridge period 40 years ago and the 1970s and 1980s. Those changes could not possibly have been foreseen and, as a result of them, the context in which the welfare state operates today is different from the circumstances in which it was created.

Secondly, the ever-growing demands on the welfare state will continue to increase, probably at an accelerating rate. Chancellors of the Exchequer will always have an anxiety here.

Thirdly, the Health Service, which is a vital part of the fabric of our society, is not as efficient or as cost-effective as we would like it to be. In that situation it would have been wise to undertake a review on at least as big a scale as the original Beveridge commission. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has set several reviews in hand. He announced them during the

[Mr. Francis Pym]

past year and they are nearing completion, but I doubt whether they are far-reaching or fundamental enough to be able to recommend the adjustments that may well be necessary.

In particular, we must look in a radical way at how the social services are provided. We are most unlikely to generate anything like enough economic growth to fund the scale of social services that people would like to have. There will be a continuing squeeze on resources in relation to demand. The task is to provide the best social services that we can afford in the most efficient way. Therefore, we should at least examine the feasibility of privatising some of the social services with the Government providing people in need with the resources to buy their own services. I do not say that that will necessarily provide the best answer in all cases, but I am urging a new, radical and imaginative approach that will deal effectively with the needs and problems of the future, and thus maintain the best possible welfare state. Such a review could follow on the six minor reviews that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has set up. It might well take a couple of years, but that does not matter because the work should be done.

By far the most important issue both now and in the future for our people is employment. Indeed, it has been for some years. At last the Government are beginning to acknowledge the nature and depth of the problem. I applaud all the action that they have taken, especially for the young, and the new measures announced yesterday, but the Government have not yet measured up to the scale of the changes taking place, so they have not responded to them. They adhere with notable rigidity to the economic policies prepared in the 1970s—the policies that were going to create "real jobs". Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor confirmed that in his speech today. But it cannot be denied that those policies have not yielded the results claimed for them. Despite the encouragement that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor drew from the various favourable developments, they show no sign of producing those results yet. That is because those policies are being applied in circumstances that have completely changed.

As a result of the world recession and the other events, we have rising unemployment. From the outset—from the autumn of 1979, or wherever one cares to pitch it—the Government have consistently misjudged unemployment. I believe that under present policies it will continue to rise. I am sorry to have to say that to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who is a much greater economic expert than I am, but that is my view. However, I cannot find any business man who does not think that unemployment will continue to rise in present circumstances. The Government are reluctant to accept that and therefore, of course, their policies cannot deal with it. They expressed deep concern in the Gracious Speech but the Government's actions and response are not commensurate with that concern.

Mr. Hayes: Is not my right hon. Friend deeply depressed by the fact that in the next three years or so 550,000 jobs will have to be created to keep employment as it presently is? Does he not agree that the most responsible thing to do with the resources set aside for tax cuts would be to invest them in improving the infrastructure?

Mr. Pym: I am in much agreement with my hon. Friend but I do not want to depart from what I wanted to say to the House. My right hon. Friend the Lord Privy Seal laughs, but in the interests of the House—

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): A direct answer to that question would be revealing for us all.

Mr. Pym: I believe that if there is money to spare when the outturn comes at the time of the Budget, it would be right to use it for the benefit of the unemployed in a job-creating role.

We need a strategy that encompasses not only the present high levels of unemployment but future developments and needs. That strategy should begin from a much better analysis than we have at present of likely future trends and, in particular, the development of the technological revolution. We know that new technology industries will create some new jobs, but they will be skilled jobs. I draw hon. Members' attention to the statement made last week by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. He said:

"I am keenly aware that, even at the present level of unemployment, it is an appalling fact that we still face serious skill shortages."—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1984; Vol. 65, c. 1244.]

That points to a lack of forethought and a lack of strategy in the years gone by. On that basis, I do not see how it can be thought possible that the new technological industries can provide the new jobs. It is a feature of ministerial speeches that they express the view that just as the industrial revolution generated a mass of new jobs, so the technological revolution will do the same. But I do not believe that that is so, and on the basis of that statement it seems unlikely to be able to do so.

The technological revolution will also make many unskilled workers redundant. That is at the heart of the challenge that we face on unemployment. A strategy for employment must include all aspects of the problem. There is the educational element, which in itself has two aspects. First, there is industrial training, where new efforts are now being made. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment spoke about that yesterday. I completely endorse all that. It may be late in the day to begin, but new efforts are being made and every drive must be made to encourage such training and to increase it as quickly as possible. Secondly, the education of our children should include an element that will enable them to appreciate and enjoy greater leisure than their fathers or grandfathers knew. Unless the education system takes that into account, people will not be able to take full advantage of the marvellous opportunities offered by technology.

The strategy must also face up to the regional problems. National statistics disguise the extreme unevenness of unemployment, ranging from single percentage figures to 30 or 40 per cent. Yesterday my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Hordern) made a very effective speech about Liverpool. The geographical pattern spells a major problem. National averages are not much guide. What are we going to do with the cities that were created during the industrial revolution and that are no longer wanted? Do we take work to the people in them, or help the people to go to the work? Many attempts have been made at the former, with a high failure rate, but few attempts have been made at the latter, although that policy was a feature of the

recovery in the 1930s. I believe that we want both and that we want a new policy to cope with the situation. Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) made an important intervention about encouraging activity in the inner cities.

We must also do much more work on job sharing, and find out more about people's wishes and views about dividing their working time. We must find out how they feel about the balance between time off and reduced income. It would also be helpful to know more about what is happening in other countries. The strategy must also take account of the public expenditure implications. Earlier retirement is likely to be a feature, although it is obviously very expensive. We have already spoken about more education and training. I should add that private industry is not doing enough. It is not putting enough resources into that and is not contributing in the way that it should be doing. There are also the demands for more social services, to which I have referred.

I acknowledge that that strategy will cost something, and make no secret of it. But it is worth it, because we must find a balance in the strategy between counter-inflation, measures to deal with unemployment and growth. The strategy that I have described is, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer would say, a "credible policy". I also believe that such a strategy would be much closer to what most people want. But all of it highlights the vital need for growth. Without it, our difficulties will be compounded, with social and political consequences. Thank goodness there is growth, but we should like it to be much more extensive.

The Government are right to stress the importance of a flexible and competitive economy, but by itself that is not enough. The Government have given a lot of new help to new businesses and technology, which I strongly support, but they should not be involved only with new or small businesses. Our future depends far more on the extension and development of existing businesses. It is no longer enough just to try to create the most favourable climate for them, although that remains a vital and fundamental function of Government. The world is now much more complex. The Governments of other countries are closely involved with their industries and often support them, creating distortions in the market that cannot just be wished away. Therefore, I want to see a more effective partnership between Government, management and the unions—an unfashionable view, but fashion is a poor guide here. I remind the House that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has spoken of establishing a new relationship with the unions after the miners' strike is over, and she is right.

I see the Government's role as strategic and supportive; positive rather than passive. Such a strategy would incorporate practical policies to reduce unemployment. That must surely include policies to remove the obstacles to employment. It will be a slow process, but it is important.

Such a strategy should have a European dimension, too. Theoretically, that should come first. Unemployment is a European problem. Indeed, it is a world problem. No vigorous attempt seems to be made to deal with it on a European basis. The same applies to new technology. Our performance compares unfavourably with that of our competitors. The United States and Japan are outstripping us easily. The only way to compete with them effectively is on a European scale. We should make a real attempt —a far more enthusiastic attempt — to tackle on a Community basis some of the great challenges that we all face in Europe.

That leads me to the Foreign Office budget and the aid programme. The Chancellor said yesterday that it has not changed, that it is still £1,870 million. Of course, with respect to the Chancellor, it has changed because of factors such as exchange rates and inflation in other countries which cannot be quantified. The amount involved seems to be between £30 million and £100 million. That is the size of the effective cut. In my view it is a great mistake. With the world in its present unstable state the cut is unwise. It is a wrong assessment of public expenditure priorities.

The Chancellor said today that his interest was in the total figure, but it is more than that. The breakdown of that figure and the priorities are important. The Foreign Office has made its contribution to containing public expenditure over the past five years, but now that has gone too far. At the same time as reducing numbers there has been a big shift of emphasis from the political to the trade side. It was, indeed, necessary to build up the trade side, but the result is that the diplomatic service proper has been thinned down too much. In current circumstances I should like it strengthened. That is not expensive.

The same applies to the aid programme. With the present deprivations and political worries in the Third world this is a time to increase our investment in those countries. That is what aid really is. Many of the countries are Commonweath countries which matter to us.

The recent appalling tragedy of Mrs. Ghandi's murder emphasises that. Effectively, she was the leader of the Third world and a key figure in maintaining calm and stability despite all the problems and tensions. She has no obvious successor in that role. We can expect the strains and tensions to increase. At least, it would be unwise to make any other assumption. Our reaction and response should be commensurate with that.

The Government's decision in that area of expenditure is short sighted. Some of my hon. Friends do not like even the concept of overseas aid, but I believe them to be profoundly misguided. Britain has a major and unique role in the world. Britain has an influence for stability and peace that must be used to the full.

We should increase the activities of the British Council and the BBC overseas service. Not only are they excellent ambassadors for Britain, but they are excellent ambassadors for greater understanding and harmony. They are national assets, unique to Britain, which for strategic reasons should be enhanced.

Again, I note a Government decision that neglects the long term. I urge them to think much harder about that in this and all areas of policy. If they do, the present probability of a Conservative Government continuing in office beyond the next election will become a certainty. What is more, they will deserve to continue.

5.14 pm

Mr. Roy Jenkins (Glasgow, Hillhead): I hope that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will not leave the Chamber yet, because I have some specific things to say to him.

The right hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym) made a wide-ranging and far-seeing speech to which I listened with much interest. I agreed with much of it—in particular his concluding remarks, not about the return of a Conservative Government, but about the

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Foreign Office, our representation abroad and overseas aid. I am sorry that the Chancellor could not stay to listen to two sentences about his right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East.

The Chancellor made an effective debating speech this afternoon. If tu quoque between him and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) could solve our economic problems, Britain would be the most prosperous nation in the world.

I cannot recollect the reputation of a Chancellor declining as sharply as that of the present Chancellor in the past eight months. In some ways, he deserves sympathy, because his reputation has declined at least as fast as the pound against the dollar, but without the compensation of a little recent rallying which the pound has shown. One wonders why that has happened. The Chancellor has many of the qualities necessary for his difficult office. He certainly has nerve and at least as great an understanding of the technicalities of his difficult job as many, if not most, of his predecessors. However, that is all vitiated by a fatal combination of complacency and insensitivity, epitomised in a passage of his speech on 30 October, when he said:

"Our policies are already bearing fruit."

So they should, after five and a half years. It would have been a barren tree if no fruit were forthcoming after that time. What sort of fruit are the policies bearing? The Chancellor continued:

"We are now in the fourth year of a steady economic recovery, and I see no sign of it faltering—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1984; Vol. 65, c. 1180.]

I shivered for the future when I took in that misplaced self-congratulation. That description of the past and prophecy for the future would be pushing things even if our production were surging ahead, if the unemployed were being sucked back into jobs and if we had one of the strongest economies in the world. In view of recent facts and future prospects, those words are almost the equivalent of Mr. Ian MacGregor congratulating himself on his handling of public relations.

There has been some mild recovery since the deep trough of 1980-81, but, taken as a whole, the first five and a half years of this Government's policy have been barren. About 2 million fewer people are at work than in 1979. Manufacturing production is one eighth down. Manufacturing investment is still substantially lower than when the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) left office—and it was not all that magnificent then, by international standards. Above all, our balance of payments on everything except oil has gone into massive deficit in the last three years. Even in 1981, despite the damaging effect of an unnecessary and unjustifiably high sterling exchange rate, we had a surplus of £500 million on our manufacturing trade. What will the deficit on manufactured trade be this year? It looks like being between £10 billion and £11 billion.

The rational basic object of economic policy, as the hon. Member for East Lindsey (Mr. Tapsell) pointed out yesterday, should be to achieve results—primarily an increase in national wealth—and not to strike attitudes.

Judged by results, the Chancellor's attempt to portray the past four years as a golden economic age looks not only wrong, but ludicrous. It casts doubt not on his veracity—which he may regard as expendable—but on his sense. The Chancellor's "set fair" view of the future is even more disturbing. What are the salient facts about the prospect that confronts us and the remainder of the world? There is the certainty of a slowdown in the rapid rate of American economic growth that has taken place until recently. Indeed, it has begun already. In annual terms, the growth rate was 10 per cent. in the first quarter of the year, 7·5 per cent. in the second and 2·7 per cent. in the third. In addition, there is likely to be a fairly determined post-election attempt to reduce the federal deficit. I accept that that is probably necessary. Super-Keynesianism by the back door, without acknowledgement in Washington, has produced a bonanza in the United States during the past few years. The size of the deficit, and its non-inflationary, non-cyclical character, makes it very different from our deficit or the deficits of the main industrialised countries, and would certainly shock Keynes.

Let us be in no doubt that the correction of the deficit will be unpleasant for Britain, for Europe and for the world. Last year, half of the growth in world trade came from the United States. The slowing down or halting of United States growth will have a far more depressing effect on Britain and Europe than can be counterbalanced by the possibility of lower interest rates. There is a real danger that without positive corrective action in Britain and Europe, the incipient recovery will force the European countries back into the recession before recovery has really begun and before it has affected unemployment totals.

Such a likely economic scenario will have still more devastating effects upon the developing world, whose countries are already suffering from a combination of very low commodity prices and a burden of debt that, on average, pre-empts about one third of their export earnings. If those earnings fell any further, the debt would become unsustainable and we could still have a major financial collapse that would lash back upon the trade and economic performances of the industrialised world.

We in Britain have our own peculiar problem of how, when the oil supply runs down, we can earn our living and achieve a tolerable balance of payments. I am not saying that the oil will run out during the lifetime of most hon. Members, but it will certainly run down, so we cannot continue to produce a massive surplus to counterbalance a massive deficit.

Dominating everything is that massive and slowly growing lump of intractable unemployment. The Chancellor's policy is to ignore that. Yet unemployment has grown by about 15,000 a month during the past year—almost 200,000 in a year. That has occurred during the steady and sustained recovery about which the Chancellor has been so lyrical. It has occurred while the world's strongest economy across the Atlantic has forged ahead at a rate that it cannot possibly sustain. When that rate is reversed, the rate of increase in our unemployment is likely to accelerate.

The hard fact is that with present policies, there is virtually no chance of unemployment falling below 3 million during this Parliament. Indeed, there is a considerable chance that if the American slowdown is not balanced by deliberate expansion in Europe, unemployment will go beyond 4 million. The outlook is far from being set fair. The outlook for unemployment is depressing. Even on the most favourable assumptions, there are additional hazards that could make the outlook not only depressing, but catastrophic. The Chancellor's complacency in those circumstances is a national menace.

What should be done to correct the position? I do not think that we can simply hope to muddle through the international debt crisis. Of course, there is a 70 per cent. chance that we might do that, but is a 30 per cent. risk acceptable? That depends not only on the statistical probabilities, but upon the consequences if things go wrong. If we were contemplating a picnic and were told that there was a 30 per cent. chance that it might rain, we might be prepared to take a risk because of the 70 per cent. chance that the weather might be fine. Even if it rained, that would not be catastrophic. But if we were about to board an aeroplane and were told that there was a 30 per cent. chance that the aeroplane would crash before reaching its destination, most of us would rapidly leave the boarding area. When assessing whether risks are acceptable, it is important to look not only at the probabilities, but at the consequences if things go wrong.

Mr. Peter Hordern (Horsham): The right hon. Gentleman's analogy of the aircraft and the 30 per cent. chance of crashing was one that he used when the Social Democratic party was first launched. I do not know how he rates that now.

The right hon. Gentleman is asking the European Community — he mentioned this when speaking at a function last week — to expand to take up the growth that the Americans will no longer be able to provide. How does he envisage that happening when both France and West Germany are markedly reluctant to expand their economies?

Mr. Jenkins: I did not use the analogy of the aeroplane during the launch of the Social Democratic party. I used a quite different analogy which turned out to be a singularly happy choice as the SDP's angle of ascent exceeded my expectations. I shall mention expansion in Europe, but when the hon. Gentleman intervened I was dealing with international debt. I am sure that he wants me to deliver my speech in a logical rather than illogical order.

While there is a probability that we could muddle through the international debt crisis, there is a danger that things could go wrong and that there would be a financial catastrophe. The effects of that upon world investment, confidence and trade would be so great that we cannot afford to hope that things will come out right on the night. We should mount an advance international rescue operation, not unlike that mounted by the Americans for the Continental Illinois bank.

The responsibility for the present position lies partly with the banks that lent the money, partly with the Governments of the developed countries — ourselves, America and others — who encouraged the banks because it was the only way to deal with the position after the second oil price increase, and partly with the Governments of the developing countries who borrowed the money but did not always spend it wisely. There is a spread of responsibility. Therefore, some of the costs of mounting a rescue operation should be similarly spread.

The Governments of the lending countries should set up a consortium to buy risky debts — they could be identified by the bankers themselves — at a substantial discount. That would be the penalty that the banks would have to pay. The debts could then be rescheduled at a significantly lower rate of interest—for example, 6 per cent.—which the borrowing countries would be obliged to pay. It would be a costly operation, especially for the United States, but it would be nothing like as costly as the burden that would fall on the United States and other countries if they had to mount massive rescue operations to prevent banks from becoming bankrupt. The benefits that would accrue from removing that threat or menace would be immense.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkins: I think that I should continue.

The direct and central need—this brings me to the issue raised by the hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Hordern) — is to co-ordinate European expansion to offset the American slowdown. The hon. Gentleman anticipated correctly what I would say. If this does not occur, world growth rates will decline and all the problems of both the poor and the rich countries will be exacerbated.

I stress the need for co-ordinated action. If one country makes a dash for expansion on its own, it is likely to get into balance of payments and exchange rate problems and hence inflation problems. That was to a considerable extent the experience of France in 1981-82.

The Community's trade is now sufficiently integrated within the Ten to make expansion reasonably safe and sustainable if it is co-ordinated. Could an agreement on co-ordinated expansion be achieved? I do not know for certain, but I know that it will not be achieved unless we try to achieve it, and Britain is certainly in a position to take a lead. Britain has the lowest percentage public sector borrowing requirement of any Community country—in those terms it has almost the lowest requirement of any country in the world — but it has the highest unemployment rate of any major country in the Community. Given the depression of the early 1980s, it may be that Britain has the highest growth potential, if it can be released, of any Community country. However, we shall not achieve expansion and we shall not encourage others to move with us in the absence of any agreement.

The House will recall that a conservative expansion plan was agreed at the Bonn western economic summit in 1978. That was aborted by the world oil price increase which came along immediately afterwards. That, at any rate, will not come again. If a plan for expansion were to be agreed, it would not be appropriate to seek agreement with the United States, which has been out of phase with us with its extremely rapid expansion during the past few years. I think that a plan can be agreed with the other European countries, but it will not be achieved so long as we adhere to the inappropriate aim of a further reduction in public sector borrowing.

Our public sector borrowing is low by international standards. Furthermore, the total weight of public debt in Britain is low by historic standards. It is barely half what it was 20 years ago, at the beginning of the 1960s, in a non-inflationary period.

I am not against some stringency in public finance. I am not against stringency, when necessary, in public sector borrowing. It is almost boringly well known that I was the only Chancellor since the war to have a negative public sector borrowing requirement, but that was in different circumstances. If the Chancellor were in his place, I would tell him that he and the Government have no chance of reducing unemployment significantly below 3 million so long as the Government adhere to their obsession with the public sector borrowing requirement,

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which the Chancellor is not very successful in controlling in any event. In the right hon. Gentleman's absence, I give that message to the Leader of the House.

I believe that many Conservative Members are deeply uneasy about unemployment and its consequences. They know that as long as they support such a policy they, or their party, will be responsible for having spent the proceeds of the oil spate upon unemployment benefit and little else.

I am surprised that every Cabinet public expenditure engagement is now fought out almost entirely in public. We are told that the Chancellor has won or has lost. It might almost be more appropriate to introduce television cameras into Cabinet meetings. That would be more appropriate than leaving it to civil servants to leak documents. To what does the Chancellor attribute this extraordinary publicity? Does he think that it is primarily the amiability of his character or the loyalty of his colleagues? In any event, it has achieved remarkable proportions.

Even if the Prime Minister is distancing herself slightly from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he should not try to distance himself from public expenditure decisions on overseas aid. The Foreign Secretary is no longer the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The right hon. Gentleman is in that position, not the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe). Any cut in real terms in the meagre total of our overseas aid would be unacceptable lunacy when we are trying to deal in Ethiopia with an eruption which arose from a much more widespread, longer-term and underlying problem, which is the relentless advance of the desert across sub-Saharan Africa, the destruction of the topsoil and the increasing inability of a growing population to feed itself. In those circumstances, the medium-term need for water is as necessary as the short-term need for grain. To respond to a crisis and then to implement a policy of aid reduction would be to make the repetition of the disaster more likely. That would be typical of the tactical skill and strategic sterility of the Chancellor.

5.38 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): The right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins) devoted much of his speech to the international debt. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, and probably many on the Opposition Benches, agree that it is a world problem. One of the difficulties of the world debt is the tremendous interest burden. There has to be rescheduling from time to time, and so the debt increases without the country concerned receiving any cash. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that some concerted effort should be made to sell whatever debts have been left by a bank. The best way would be to channel the debts through the IMF or the World Bank. The World Bank, for example, could then reschedule the interest.

If, for example, an American bank has a debt of 100 units at 12 per cent. with a particular country and it sells the debt for 50 units to the World Bank—the original bank has probably already discounted the value of the security—the World Bank will have the responsibility and authority to charge a lower rate of interest. The IMF will then be able to have some control over the economies of the borrowing countries. One of the difficulties with overseas debts is, in some instances, the profligacy of the borrowing countries. That must cease.

The right hon. Member for Hillhead spoke about the topsoil structure of the starving countries. We must remember that in many instances their problems have been brought on by their Governments. Many of them have spent their economic resources on building up arms, not helping the population. I do not want to spend too much time on the overseas debt.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) is no longer in the Chamber. He rather blamed Governments for their policies of the past 10 or 15 years. It will be in your recollection, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Conservative Administrations have never borrowed from the IMF, but Labour Administrations have. I mention that merely for the record. When the Conservative Government took over, there was $22 billion of overseas debt. Today, there is $11 billion. The Government have repaid half the debt.

My right hon. Friend should keep on the course that we have followed over the past four or five years. Many people, including some of my hon. Friends, would like more expenditure. That has been tried in many countries. We have tried it here in the past. We have tried to spend our way out of recession, and what has happened has been disastrous. One has only to look across the channel at the French economy. When President Mitterrand came to power two or three years ago, he did the same, and spent and spent. That eventually caught up with him.

One of the matters that has come out of the Gracious Speech very forcefully was the anxiety felt in all parts of the House about the scourge of unemployment. It is unfair and unreasonable of Opposition Members to say that the Conservative party has no compassion for the unemployed. It is not the prerogative of the Labour party, the Liberal party or the SDP to have compassion for the unemployed. If one considers the history of unemployment, the House will be aware that from the early 1950s the unemployment trend has been upwards.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Nonsense.

Sir William Clark: The right hon. Gentleman can refute that when he replies to the debate, if he does.

This country may have suffered from poor management or the intransigence of trade unions and so on more than any other Western industrialised country. We have been industrially overmanned. That is why unemployment has increased and why, with the world recession, private enterprise particularly had to shed labour to stay in business. We keep talking about unemployment and what we can do to help it. The Government spend over £2 billion of taxpayers' money on the youth training scheme and other schemes. We all applaud that, but it is a deeper problem and throwing money at it will not solve it.

We should consider the position of the potential employer. I declare an interest because I am in business with various companies. We ask why an employer does not take on another man. We should study our employment legislation. Wages councils, for example, inhibit the taking on of an extra employee. Unfair dismissal procedures, the employment protection legislation and the Manpower Services Commission are supposed to be looking after employment, but I believe that they are interfering with the engaging of an individual.

The United States and Japan have been mentioned. Over the past 10 years 15 million new jobs have been created in America. Why is that? The Americans do not have any wages councils, employment protection, or unfair dismissal procedures. They allow the employer and the employee to make their own arrangements. I should have thought that we would want to do that. Over the years successive Governments have tried to regulate employment, and that just does not work. The proof of the pudding is in the number of unemployed that we have.

My second point relates to the cost of the welfare state. I support my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym), who drew attention to the different circumstances at the time of the Beveridge report and today. The total budget for social services today approaches £40 billion. I accept that that includes unemployment pay and so on, but the magnitude of the figure and percentage of our GDP is very different from what Beveridge thought about. I agree with my right hon. Friend that we should have another Beveridge report.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has set up various investigations, but I do not believe that they will be sufficiently comprehensive. I hope that I am proved wrong. We cannot nibble at this subject. There are many matters involved in the welfare state, and we hear about them daily. There are the people who go down to the south coast to live on holiday and who receive an allowance. There is something wrong with that. Foreign students come over here and take money, and then there is legal aid for foreigners. I know that such things probably do not add up to much, but they are symptomatic of the slackness within our welfare services. A proper investigation would be extremely helpful.

We seem somehow to have our priorities wrong when we deal with welfare benefits. I have never understood why a voluntary one-parent family receives better treatment than a married couple in similar domestic circumstances. Something should be done about that. It would do some of our leading clergymen good to pay a little more attention to the morality of the nation than to its politics.

The third point that I wish to make is about pensions. I must declare an interest because I am a consultant for the Life Insurance Association and Commercial Union Assurance Company. I wish to take the matter in its long term. Our occupational pensions are an adjunct to our welfare services. If we did not have occupational pension schemes, the social security and supplementary benefit burden on the taxpayer could be tremendous. The fact that people can obtain from their employer when they retire a pension to which they have contributed during their working life keeps them away from the supplementary benefit board, and consequently nothing should be done to harm occupational pensions.

There have been rumours about the "lump sum" part of pensions. The House will recollect that in many cases one can have a reduced pension by taking a lump sum which is roughly one and a half times one's earnings when one retires. That system has been in operation since 1909. It was enjoyed at first only by civil servants. It has grown ever since, and was considered by the Wilson committee when it was studying the City. The committee found that the lump sum was an anomaly but that it had been going on for so long that it would be extremely difficult to get rid of it.

There are other rumours that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor might take it upon himself to tax the income of pension funds. At the moment pensions funds enjoy a tax-free status. That means that those people who have been paying into pension funds over the years expect, when they reach the age of 60 or 65, to receive a certain sum each year based upon a formula of the number of years that they have worked, and so on. The actuary has worked out the pension on the basis of the pension fund remaining tax-free. If tax is charged, the expectations of all those who are working towards the date when they receive their pension will necessarily be reduced. It would be folly to upset the balance, because occupational pensions relieve the burden on the taxpayer.

I wholly share the Government's philosophy that people should own their own houses. We have had wonderful success in the sale of council houses because of discounts and mortgage interest relief. I hope that there is no talk of taking that relief away. I should have thought that pensions were in the same category as those measures. They are a form of saving, and we should not do anything to damage them.

The Chancellor's statement was generally well received. Although there have been some snide remarks and a few sneers, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on reaching a target of £132 billion. We can argue about the breakdown of that figure, but it was an extremely successful operation to keep to that target. I remind those hon. Members who say that our public sector borrowing requirement and overspending levels are low that next year it will cost the British taxpayer £16.5 billion to pay just the interest on the national debt. I accept the fact that that will be only 2 per cent. of our GDP, as the right hon. Member for Hillhead said, but that amount is in addition to the £132 billion. I should have thought that a cost of more than £45 million a day is one that we would not want to increase.

The abolition of unemployment must have the highest priority, and I know that the Government have taken that aim on board. Despite what some people have said, the Government are giving high priority to that aspect. We should be cautious about wage claims. It is extremely worrying that those involved in, for example, the car industry, which is just about on its feet, are to go on strike. Strikes mean only that jobs will be lost. Over the years, we have seen our car industry go downhill, simply because some trade unions have priced their men out of work.

I welcome the tax cuts. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has been involved in an altercation about those cuts. I believe that the £1·5 billion tax cuts that are promised should go into the pockets of the taxpayer. I do not like talking logically with the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, because he gets mixed up with illogicalities. When there is a £1·5 billion reduction in taxation, why complain that taxation is high? However, when the Government say that they will reduce taxation, the Opposition say that they must not. Does the Labour party, if, God forbid, it ever regained office, intend to increase taxes so that we will have more money to spend in the public sector and create more jobs? I am sure that that would be a recipe for disaster.

Many claims will be made about the suggested £1·5 billion tax cuts. I am sure that the Chancellor's postbag will contain suggestions not only from Members of Parliament but from people all over on how to spend that £1·5 billion. We should concentrate on taking as many

[Sir William Clark]

people as possible in the lower income range out of the income tax bracket. In view of increasing privatisation —British Telecom, British Airways and the rest—my right hon. Friend the Chancellor should ascertain whether some of that £1·5 billion can be used to help people to invest in that privatisation.

I believe that our economic base is firm and that we should not change course. We have a firm base, and we should build on it.

5.55 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) was right to say that we must look at the welfare state. Everyone who is serious about the future of the welfare state knows that certain things must be done. The hon. Gentleman suggested that the welfare state should be dismantled, that the wages councils should be abolished and that there should be certain arrangements for the system dealing with unfair dismissal.

Sir William Clark: I did not say that.

Mr. Heffer: I believe that the hon. Gentleman was clearly hinting in that direction. His speech added up to an expression of a Right-wing reactionary view which we often hear from Conservative Members—all the benefits that working people in particular have gained over the years should be taken from them as a way of dealing with our severe economic crisis.

Sir William Clark *rose*——

Mr. Heffer: I shall not give way too quickly or too early.

Sir William Clark: The hon. Gentleman should not misrepresent me.

Mr. Heffer: I do not think that I have misrepresented the hon. Gentleman. That is the only conclusion to which anyone could come after listening to the hon. Gentleman's speech.

One thing is clear: the economic crisis in this country exists in just about every western European country, the United States and Canada. The economic crisis is basically a product of a type of economic system. The problems in Britain are worsened because of the Government's policies. The Government have deliberately used unemployment as a weapon to deal with that crisis at the expense of the mass of ordinary people. For many years, hon. Members on both sides of the House were dedicated to Keynesian economics, but Keynesian economics are no longer sufficient to deal with the depth of the crisis.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) that we cannot have an expanding welfare state with a declining economy. I think that everyone recognises that that is an impossibility. If we try to have both, we end up with constant confrontation and, as has happened in some other countries, with such a severe economic and political crisis that the democratic structure is destroyed and one form or other of dictatorship is brought in. That is the reality of where we stand. We need new radical economic policies that move from either the Government's policies of confrontation or the old Keynesian economic policies. We have to move towards a Socialist solution to the economic problems of the day.

The Government have decided that the way to deal with the economic problems is through confrontational policies against the trade unions and by putting the burden of the crisis on to the shoulders of ordinary working people. They are not arguing for a redistribution of wealth.

Mr. Yeo: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heffer: I know that I shall upset Tory Members, but I hope that they will stay in their places. That will then mean more time for everybody else to speak.

I should like to refer to what I think is the important issue overshadowing the debate in the House and the country at present. Clearly, I am referring to the miners' dispute, which is serious. I have never seen, in 20 years in the House of Commons, so much hatred displayed by hon. Members in the Tory party against any trade union leaders as I have seen recently in relation to the leadership of and the trade unionists in the National Union of Mineworkers.

Let me make it clear. In defending the mineworkers' leaders, I have disagreed not once but many times with Arthur Scargill, and I have no doubt that I shall disagree with him again. I am renowned for disagreeing with many people, so Arthur Scargill is not beyond the pale when it comes to arguing with people. For example, I do not agree with Arthur Scargill's view on worker control. I believe that we need forms of management by workers in big industry. Arthur does not believe in it. He accepts something that many hon. Members should take into their bosoms. He actually agrees with proportional representation. I think that he is wrong. I told him so. Arthur also does not support Solidarity in Poland or the development of free and independent trade unions in the Eastern European states in same way as I do. Therefore, I disagree with Arthur Scargill in many areas.

However, I support Scargill, the leaders of the NUM and the workers who are on strike. I particularly support the leaders because they are courageous fighters for their union, their members and working-class people who are suffering under the Government's policies. They deserve the unqualified support of each and every one in the trade union and Labour movement. They have received that support, despite what the press has tried to make out, from the Labour party. Since March the national executive committee of the Labour party has given its support to the mineworkers and urged the constituency Labour parties to raise money for the miners. That has been done on a tremendous scale, to such an extent that I heard some of the mineworkers' leaders saying that the Labour party had raised more funds for the miners in their struggle than any other body.

Last night the Prime Minister used the Lord Mayor's banquet at the Guildhall as an occasion to attack the NUM leaders. Undoubtedly it was an appropriate place for her to be. There they were, sitting there, well fed and having a nice evening. No doubt the occasion was lavish. Yet the working class is suffering poverty and misery in some areas of the country and miners are at the soup kitchens, being kept going only through the support of fellow workers who collect their pennies so that the miners can have a meal.

The Prime Minister implied that the miners' pickets were similar to the IRA. She knows that that is not true. However, if people constantly tell a lie over the years—we saw the Goebbels machine in Germany—in the end

people believe that lie. That is what is happening today, with what the Government are trying to do in relation to the miners. I found to my cost that the lies and innuendoes in the press are difficult to combat.

It does not seem to cross the Prime Minister's mind that the Government's policies are responsible for the atmosphere of violence in this country. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) made an important speech. Pointing to the Government Benches, he said that it is time that the Government changed their basic attitudes towards the miners and understood that they were decent, loyal, honest people. That applies to those who are on strike, not just to those who are working. They must be understood. But the Prime Minister does not even begin to understand them. She does not try to understand them.

Many Tory Members went to public schools such as Eton and Harrow and then joined a Guards regiment. They are very proud of being in it. They are proud that they can be part and parcel of a great regiment, fighting together for what they believe. They say "Unity is strength." Miners and the trade unionists are their own Guards regiment. They have the same loyalty to their organisations as Tory Members had when they were gallant officers in a Guards regiment. One must understand and realise that. One must reach an accommodation in the end. The Government have not done so.

My right hon. Friend said that the National Coal Board had made certain concessions. I do not deny it. But it is not generally known that the NUM has also made concessions. It has issued statements to the press saying what it has done, but not one word has been printed. I wonder why. I wonder why the NCB's statements were printed, but not those of the NUM.

We must change the atmosphere of violence. The Prime Minister has heightened the fight against the miners and the trade unions by saying that she regards trade unionists as the enemies within. She talks about trade unionists as being subversive and being ruthless leaders. It is the Government's policy of unemployment, anti-trade union legislation, extra and new powers for the police and unqualified acceptance of judges' decisions that is causing workers and trade unionists, employed and unemployed, to feel frustrated and to feel fear. It is causing an atmosphere in this country that we have never known, certainly not since I was a young lad. That worries me. I do not know where this country is going, but I warn the Government that if they continue with their confrontational policies against workers and trade unions, only disaster can lie ahead.

Some Conservative Members know that the Government's policies are wrong. They must stand up and tell Ministers, "Change course before it is too late." They cannot remain silent. When a Labour Government were in power and Back Benchers thought that their policies were moving in the wrong direction they said so. I should like to see some courage and determination from Conservative Members. They make wishy-washy, wet speeches about the economy, but they ought also to concern themselves with civil liberties and the future of our country.

I do not agree with SDP policies and, after my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was thrown out of the Chamber yesterday, it is difficult for me to have to admit that the Leader of the SDP, the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) made some good points in a radio interview this morning, along the lines of what I have been saying. Conservative Members ought to realise that the Government are increasingly in a minority position over the miners' dispute and the general drift of affairs in this country.

I have been involved with many strikes. People have to know when to strike and when to go back. They have to know how far they can go and how much they can achieve. They must not allow their forces to be so dispersed that the future of the organisation is put in jeopardy.

I once had to tell thousands of workers who had been on strike for six months over the dismissal of myself and five other senior shop stewards, "Go back, brothers. We will not win this one. March back onto that site as a group and elect your new stewards immediately." That was difficult for me, but I knew it had to be done.

I do not believe that the miners are in that situation, but we must remember that they must be supported by the Labour movement so that they can come out of the dispute with an honourable settlement, in the interests of themselves and their families and in the interests of the people of this country.

I ask Conservative Members not to be too keen on jumping into confrontation. Let us all seek a proper solution that will benefit the miners and their families, help the fight against unemployment and ensure that the trade union movement maintains its unity and strength in the face of future moves by this anti-trade union Government.

6.13 pm

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): If I do not take up the theme of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), it is not because I think that he has not raised important issues or because I do not respect many of his views. However, when he said that the NUM had made concessions, he did not mention the condition on which the union continues to insist—the maintenance of all pits, however uneconomic. I suggest that when the hon. Gentleman was a trade union leader he would never have imposed such a condition. That claim by the NUM differentiates the present dispute from any other industrial dispute that is likely to take place in this country.

However, I agree with the hon. Member for Walton that the review of the welfare state is important. I am glad that the issue was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym), who also referred to new technology. I wish to concentrate on those matters and I shall, therefore, leave aside the mining dispute for today.

I remind the House that this Government is the first for 20 years to face the prospect of a second full term of office. I especially welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East took a positive and constructive approach and drew attention to the medium and longer term.

The fact that I have a pamphlet coming out tomorrow which attempts to show that 3 million jobs could be produced by the end of the century will not prevent me from advancing some of those ideas today, because I should like to attract the interest and support of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The pamphlet sets out actions that could be taken by the Government and by industry. I shall concentrate on the

[Mr. Michael Marshall]

role of the Government, and I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Minister who is responsible for the Civil Service on the Front Bench, because I have some points to put to him. The ideas that I am putting forward are not only my own. My co-authors are a computer consultant and an industrial journalist, so our work over the past two years has been fairly widely tested.

In putting forward arguments about the wholesale embrace of new technology, I take head on the frequently-expressed worry that new technology will lead to net job losses. I do not believe that that will be the case, but there is a difficulty in quantifying where the continuing change in moving from old to new technology will occur. Our objective of 3 million new jobs by the end of the century is realistic and is spelt out in more detail in the pamphlet.

We have to accept what my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East called certain inevitabilities. He was right to draw attention to the fact that shorter working lives, shorter working weeks, earlier retirement and a society in which people live longer will present challenges, but also opportunities. The United States and Japan have come to terms with the needs of the service industries, and this country could do much more in that regard.

For example, let us consider the role of the Government as an employer. They have shown little imaginative thinking in getting away from the nine-to-five mentality. Surely it is ridiculous that the majority of people who wish to get help and assistance from the DHSS, the Inland Revenue or electricity or gas offices have to find time during their working day to visit the offices where such help can be provided.

With the adoption of new technology, it should be possible to move to staggered working hours — which may involve debates on flexi-time, job splitting, part-time working and so on — and the Government ought to be able to take a lead and reassure those who might be worried about the introduction of new technology and more flexible working. New technology, leading to the provision of services out of hours and at weekends, would not only help the public and improve the relationship between the public and the instruments of government and the nationalised industries, but provide better job opportunities, because there is evidence that people are prepared to view sympathetically the opportunities that a more flexible working pattern would allow.

My next suggestion is directed towards the Department of Trade and Industry and particularly to the information technology interest in the Department. The question of cable television is still most important. It is worrying that much of the earlier enthusiasm has died away. There have been problems, but I believe that they could have been overcome. The question of establishing interactive television, which is the key element in building on many of the social service and service industry aspects of this development, is still important. I hope that the Government will rethink the question of pay-per-view, because that is the only way in which the process can be accelerated within the private sector. In the public sector, the use of interactive television should be considered as a cost-effective way of providing an additional service.

Secondly, there is the question of copyright. I believe that within two years we must extend to computer software and all forms of electronic publishing the copyright protection already enjoyed by videos. If we do not, pirates may decimate a substantial proportion of that important industry, which offers important export opportunities and provides the background for British software skills.

Thirdly, the creation of small businesses is important. The time has come for a more imaginative look to be taken at the planning laws. The idea of working from one's own home should be fostered in the most direct way. I am thinking about planning laws which inhibit people from working at home at a time when the microcomputer society provides opportunties for many home-based, one-man businesses or partnerships. In such an area, the way ahead could be shown by Department of the Environment circulars. There may not even be any need for legislation.

There is also the wider question of industrial and commercial estates where the laws frequently forbid people from living in industrial premises. In the case of non-polluting businesses in residential and industrial areas, some flexibility would be of help.

There are enormous opportunities for helping pensioners and the disabled. The Department of Health and Social Security has done some work on the question of bulk purchasing, but a certain amount of money could usefully be spent on research in this field. More could be spent on considering the kind of equipment which could provide manfacturing jobs and export opportunities. It is time for further consideration of these matters. For instance, I think of the use of robotics in providing artificial limbs not just for those who are usually considered to be severely disabled but for those who, as they get older, could use such appliances in their own homes.

There have been developments in recent years in the provision of sheltered accommodation. We could assist the process by doing nothing — by not chopping and changing in terms of the impost of taxes and other legislative burdens on such developments within the private sector. The public sector also has an opportunity to develop purpose-built facilities in sheltered accommodation, including such equipment as I have mentioned, and using robotics and modern information technology to provide services for those who live in such accommodation and to create further industrial activity.

Turning my attention to what the Chancellor can do in such matters, I should like to reinforce his enthusiasm for the shift from direct to indirect taxation. We should be willing to face the more unpopular aspects of this shift when we consider the opportunities which the Chancellor will take to collect revenue through indirect taxation. But if my right hon. Friend were to accept that it is possible to exempt some areas from indirect taxation, he could make changes which would be positively helpful. I think, for example, of not applying value added tax to repairs and extensions to sheltered accommodation, because in that case VAT is a disincentive.

Governments rarely show a propensity to rethink policy once it has been announced, but my right hon. Friend should be flexible and when he pursues his shift from direct to indirect taxation he should be responsive to the benefits which that shift could bring with it.

One step which my right hon. Friend could take would be to raise the VAT threshold. The last uprating did no more than keep the figure below the recent increase in inflation. A VAT limitation of £30,000 would be helpful to small businesses in some of the areas which I have mentioned.

The Chancellor should look urgently at the question of the tax allowances which could be provided for the average user of a number of services. I am particularly interested in bringing the black economy back into the world of legitimate trading. My proposal on VAT would assist with that process. It is nonsense that enthusiastic —or unenthusiastic—amateurs such as myself should be left to tackle do-it-yourself jobs when we could revive and legitimise the work of craftsmen. There is a market for their skills, yet in many parts of the country it is difficult to find such help, particularly for the elderly. The figures show that there are substantial numbers of people who have sufficient means to seek such assistance and who are made increasingly anxious by their failure to get such work done through the welfare state.

I accept the fact that my proposals would involve a certain amount of rethinking and a certain ability to look ahead. My right hon. Friends will know the terrible sinking feeling which one suffers when the process of legislation, stretching into the months ahead, seems to block any opportunities for new thinking. However, because for the first time in 20 years we have a Government with a prospect of completing two full terms —this is an uncertain world, and I choose my words cautiously—we should be thinking now about new ideas and about the medium and the longer term. We have a reforming Chancellor, and a Prime Minister with an enthusiasm for harnessing science and technology. They should encourage their ministerial colleagues to move in these and other ways towards the reform of the welfare state and the wholesale embrace of the new technology.

6.27 pm

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): Nothing that I have read in the Queen's Speech and nothing that I have heard in the autumn statement, in yesterday's debate on industry and employment, in the Chancellor's speech today or in this debate will be of any consolation to my constituents. The Government's past, present and future economic policies have nothing to offer the major inner city areas such as Manchester except continued decay. The city and its neighbouring areas have felt the full impact of the long and bitter economic depression, and our manufacturing and industrial base has been laid to waste, never to be revived.

We have passed through depressions before, but this one is different. This is not a question of the peaks and troughs of the trade cycle. Workers used to be laid off because of temporary overcapacity in the production of goods, and the machinery and the factories lay idle until there was an upturn in the economy and labour was required again. Then the word would go along the grapevine that the firm was taking on labour again and that if one went down to the factory gates there would be the chance of a job. That happened in the 1930s. Factories that were closed because of over-production had laid men off. There were gangs of men at street corners with nothing better to do than kick an old football around. However, the factories remained. They were still at the end of the street. The skills remained in the hands of the workers and the machines were still in the factories. Then the whisper would go around, "They are taking men on." Engineers would go to the factory gates and be offered jobs.

Those days have gone for ever. When a firm closes now, it closes for good. There are no more whispers on the grapevine that jobs are available and that firms are offering people their old jobs. Livelihoods are also lost for ever. The labour and the skills are no longer required. It is not that they are no longer needed. They could be put to good use, providing much-needed facilities and a higher standard of living for all. The powers-that-be, however, decree otherwise. The worker is humbled by the might of high finance and the money manipulators—that is where the real power lies. With a Government such as this who champion the few who control the system, what earthly chance is there for the unemployed, especially in my constituency?

There is no chance for workers while we have a Government who, without conscience, introduce monetarist policies and laws to crush organised labour and to shackle trade unions. Is it any wonder that millions are on the dole and that there are many others who live in daily fear for their jobs? In Manchester, unemployment has increased to record levels. Although there are no seasonal factors which make more adults and school leavers unemployed during September and October, the increase in unemployment has been higher than expected. Nothing that the Chancellor said yesterday or today will help to reduce unemployment.

Figures for the travel-to-work areas around Manchester are farcical as they do not show the true picture of high unemployment in the inner city. There is 51 per cent. unemployment at one office in Moss Side. The city planning department has shown that 34 per cent. of men in part of my constituency are out of work. What prospects do such loyal workers who have given their lives to their firms have? As they say, they are bleak. They know that the firms at which they spent a lifetime are shut permanently. Firms that once had international reputations have been demolished or stand like giant tombstones, symbols of a once industrious past. They include household names such as Richard Johnson and Nephew. From its title, it was clearly a family concern. It existed for more than 200 years. It provided jobs in the area and produced some of the finest wire in the world. It was bought out by a South African consortium and was closed within 18 months with the assistance of Government grants in a so-called rationalisation programme. Workers were put on a three-day week and one day, when they returned to work, the factory gates were locked in their faces. That firm is one of many in a catalogue of closures and disasters for workers in my constituency.

Lawrence Scott was an engineering firm of many years' standing. It is now a heap of rubble. That is where the workers wanted to work but could not force their way through the huge picket line of police. The police even assisted by allowing helicopters to lift machinery out of the factory over the heads of the workers, over the roofs of the houses and over the schoolchildren playing in the playground. That was the role of the police in those days —to stop workers going to work.

The closure of such firms is felt by the small businesses that used to supply them, by shops, pubs and clubs. It is also felt by the community. But none feels it more than the workers who have no hope. I shall relate an incident that might seem humorous. After the closure of Richard Johnson and Nephew, a man walked the street in blue overalls because he did not accept that the firm at which he had worked since he had been a boy of 14 would never reopen. He is now in his fifties and has no hope because the firm is closed for ever.

[Mr. Robert Litherland]

If I could select just one industry to which the Government should apply their initiative to provide jobs and to boost the economy, it would be the construction industry. We have all heard about the further horrific cuts that were contemplated for that industry. We also heard about the threatened resignations of Ministers if the original sum suggested by the Treasury was agreed. In spite of the Secretary of State for the Environment's so-called triumph, more cuts have been made and yet more are contemplated in public sector building.

What is the public's reaction? I have received correspondence from the Group of Eight which consists of representatives of the construction industry — builders, civil engineers, material producers, designers and unions. It believes that the construction industry could make a valuable contribution to our economic revival. It wrote:

"The point that the Construction Industry should not be used as an economic regulator has been made to Government many times. It can only be assumed, from the lack of notice taken of this point, that Members of Parliament and Civil Servants either do not understand or choose to disregard it. It is perhaps understandable that a major force, such as the Construction Industry, should be used as a counter in political bargaining but the consequences of such an action should be seen for the folly they are."

The group believes that, if money is spent on housing, highways and renewing sewers, there could be a spin-off in terms of jobs. It says that liquidations in the building industry continue. It also says that repair and maintenance are reaching critical levels, that existing building stock is deteriorating and that infrastructure such as sewers, highways and waterways are not being renewed as necessary.

Housing is needed. We have thousands of construction workers on the dole and millions of stockpiled housing bricks. It is sacrilege that millions of people should be waiting for decent housing. Th men who have left the construction industry during the past decade have probably been lost for ever. The Government should realise that all the palliatives in the shape of training courses and all the false talk about creating real jobs mean little to my constituents. They know from bitter experience that the Government's economic policies have brought only misery. People want work, and they want it now. They want their dignity back. Above all, they want a future—especially the young. Any Government who steal the future of so many young people stand condemned. They should cut the cackle, cut the pretence and give us action, not words.

6.39 pm

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): By tradition, the Leader of the House replies to the debate on the Queen's Speech. I shall begin by making some points about procedure before I turn to the broader issues which we have been discussing.

The debate is about the Queen's Speech. Although you, Mr. Speaker, suggested that we should talk about economic affairs, the debate is not on the Chancellor's autumn statement, although, inevitably hon. Members tended to refer to it both yesterday and today. It is extremely important to distinguish the debate on the Queen's Speech from that on the Chancellor's autumn statement.

I hope that we shall debate the autumn statement in the near future. If that debate is to be of high quality, and if we are to be properly informed, it is important for the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee to have an opportunity to take evidence and present a report to the House. Hon. Members can then be fully informed about some of the detail which is not apparent from a 24-hour examination of the statement.

Last year's report of the Select Committee concluded:

"We hope that in future the House will be permitted to receive its Committee's report before the debate takes place, which in normal circumstances would certainly be before the Christmas adjournment."

Our programme for economic debates has become less than satisfactory, especially when, as on this occasion, the Queen's Speech and the autumn statement come together. The House must use the usual channels, and decide what the right approach to that programme should be and how to spread the major debates on the Budget, autumn statement and public expenditure White Paper so that we have opportunities at reasonable intervals and without too long gaps or too much crowding in any one period to debate major items affecting the economy and how the economy is being managed. I am worried by the large number of leaks to the press about public expenditure and possible changes in taxation. That seems to reinforce the case made in the Armstrong report for a green budget in the autumn. Hon. Members could then express their views on matters before final decisions were taken.

I wish not to make a speech about broad macro-economic principles, but to take up some points already raised. I hope that the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland), who spoke with such conviction and compassion about the plight of the unemployed, will excuse me if I do not pursue that subject. I hope, however, to be able to speak about it on another occasion.

I shall concentrate on three matters. We must consider the question of priorities. Many hon. Members have spoken about priorities. My first point relates to the section of the Queen's Speech that states:

"Following the agreement at Fontainebleau on the fairer sharing of the Community's budget burden and on the overall control of Community spending, my Government look forward to the further development of the European Community. They will continue to press for improvements in the Common Agricultural Policy".

The Select Committee took evidence on that. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury and his officials were helpful in putting forward the Government's position during the negotiations. We have not yet reached a satisfactory agreement following Fontainebleau. I am a fundamental believer in the importance of the Common Market and the great benefits that can stem from it, but if we think that it is going in the wrong direction we should tell the Government in the hope of bringing them and the Common Market back on the right lines.

We have the best opportunity since we joined the Common Market of bringing under control excessive spending on the common agricultural policy. We have run up against the 1 per cent. VAT own resources limit, which puts us in a strong bargaining position. The Common Market has spent more money than it has, and it is running out of cash. Under the negotiations which are continuing, the Government propose, subject to limitations, to increase the funds available, not by increasing the own resources limit, which the House has not had an opportunity to debate, but through an intergovernmental agreement. That would provide additional money over and

above the amount which is covered by the limit which the treaty imposed and which the House by implication accepted. That is a worrying development.

In considering the Chancellor's statement, we must ask whether we wish to spend more money on support for agriculture, especially support for French farmers, rather than on other areas of public expenditure where there have been cuts. I am not convinced that adequate consideration has been given to that increase as against the cuts which have taken place. Therefore, I ask the House to pay attention to that matter, and the Government to take action on it.

We are told that the intergovernmental agreement will be subject to a guarantee of agreement on budgetary discipline. It is a question not merely of mechanics, though they are important, but of the allocation of resources. We are told that Common Market expenditure on agriculture is not to increase as fast as expenditure generally. I have yet to hear a convincing argument that we should spend more on agricultural support in the Common Market. The Common Market has accumulated vast surpluses of agricultural products. That is extremely wasteful. It is difficult to see how the guarantee of budgetary discipline will work when the system of agricultural support is open-ended. We must consider the proposals carefully. It is extremely important that the House should have an opportunity to express views on them before a final decision is taken.

I turn to the related question of the aid programme, which has been a matter of controversy during the past 24 hours and, indeed, for longer than that. I am worried that we are accumulating huge surpluses at considerable expense. I tried to get figures for the cost of storage. The annual cost for cereal items is about £35 a tonne—that is probably a minimum figure. It is doubtful what will happen to those surpluses. They may be sold to the Russians at a greatly reduced price. We must consider whether it would reduce public expenditure if, instead of storing those surpluses indefinitely, we shipped them overseas. We may save money that way, even allowing for the cost of transport. A charitable organisation quoted the price of transport at £40 a tonne in a 10,000-tonne cargo ship. That is not the cheapest way to transport goods. If the surpluses were transported in a cleaned-out super tanker, it would be cheaper. On an annual basis, the cost of shipping surpluses would be less than the cost of storage.

I am worried that there is not sufficient co-ordination between the Foreign Office, with its aid programme, and the Ministry of Agriculture. There is scope for savings in public expenditure while meeting the understandable anxiety expressed throughout the country about aid to developing countries.

Watching the television, it is easy for all of us to feel an upsurge of emotion. It is much more difficult to fight the battle for a more rational long-term policy on aid and agricultural surpluses. The problems of the Third world will not go away. It is often argued that shipments of grain will put local producers out of business, but there is no way in which people in many of those countries will ever be able to pay for grain on a commercial basis. The overall picture is very worrying. It requires careful analysis and co-ordination among Government Departments which, alas, does not seem to be happening at the moment.

The ambiguity of the Government's position on aid in the past few days has been unfortunate. It is very odd and most worrying to be told that it all depends on the decisions of the Foreign Secretary and what other cuts he decides to make. As we all know, the Foreign Office has a very small budget. Unlike the Ministry of Defence or the Department of Health and Social Security, it cannot lose huge sums and barely notice. As soon as the Foreign Office is caught by the cuts, it is in a very difficult position. If it is to maintain its basic tasks of diplomatic representation and so on, it has to cut some other item. It may be the overseas aid programme or the BBC overseas service, on which the House has expressed clear views in the past.

I believe that there is a clear case for the Treasury and the Government in general to distinguish the main functions of the Foreign Office from overseas aid and other items. I strongly support the Chancellor's efforts to cut public expenditure, but unless such a distinction is made those efforts may lead to some very foolish decisions. I hope that progress can be made in co-ordination between Departments and the assessment of priorities.

On a quite different subject, the Government seem to be making greater efforts and assessing the priorities correctly. I refer to drug abuse, drug trafficking, and so on. I am glad to see that in this case the Government are not making cuts but spending money to tackle a problem which is a very great danger to this country. One has only to visit the United States to be aware of the constant fear of many parents that their children may become addicted to drugs even at school at the age of 10, 11 or 12. So far, we have managed to avoid that, but we must not underestimate the real danger to our society.

I therefore welcome the references to these matters in the Queen's Speech and the reasonable co-ordination that there seems to be between the many Departments involved, including Customs and Excise, the Home Office, the Foreign Office and the DHSS. There is now considerable activity in all those areas. I am glad that the Chancellor has confirmed as permanent the 60 additional staff checking the illegal import of drugs and has indeed provided for a further 100. That is a great advance. I had four years' experience in charge of Customs of Excise and I know that it does a magnificent job, but it needs the additional resources. At the Foreign Office, too, more is being done. There is now a Customs officer posted in Pakistan and the Foreign Office is spending £1 million over a period of years trying to persuade people in Pakistan not to produce the raw material that forms the basis of narcotic drugs. The Home Office, too, has taken action. The Home Secretary has said that in future he will not parole people sentenced to more than five years for drug offences and that he proposes to introduce a sentence of life imprisonment. That is absolutely right for people convicted of drug trafficking. More resources are also being made available in the DHSS.

All those developments are good and show that the Government are moving in the right direction in their increased preoccupation with the problem. Nevertheless, I do not believe that the scale of the operation is yet right. The value of recent Customs hauls is far in excess of the amount being spent to try to prevent the import of narcotic drugs. Since the beginning of this year catches have included cannabis with a street value of £20 million, cocaine with a street value of £3 million and heroin with a street value of £11 million. Those sums, which would go into the cash flow of the people involved in the traffic, are vastly greater than the £1 million being spent to deter

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people from growing the raw material and the other sums allocated to prevent drug abuse. A single haul may be worth £3 million. It is fine to have a further 160 Customs officers doing a magnificent job, but the cost of that is far below the value of a single haul seized at the east coast port near the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym). The Government are moving in the right direction, but I am not convinced that co-ordination and the assessment of public expenditure priorities are yet quite right.

In all three areas—the development of the common agricultural policy and financial discipline in the EEC, overseas aid, and the prevention of the import and abuse of narcotic drugs — more co-ordination and, in many cases, more finance are required. On the broader issue, I hope that once the Select Committee has reported we shall be able to discuss macro-economic policy, as we traditionally do. In this debate, however, I believe that it is right to bring those three issues to the attention of the House, to encourage the Government when they are going in the right direction, and to point out the error of their ways when they are going down the wrong path.

6.57 pm

Mr. Richard Wainwright (Colne Valley): Liberal Members fully share the view of the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) that the Chancellor's response on the vital question of overseas aid has not been good enough. I hope that the Leader of the House will be more responsive when he winds up the debate. In a series of written answers Secretaries of State have told the House how they intend to allocate the bulk of the sums allotted to their Departments in the autumn statement, but the Government have not told us their intentions about overseas aid. It is important that this issue should be taken up.

For a number of years I have also fully shared the view of the right hon. Member for Worthing that the form of the autumn statement is inadequate and that the House should request a green budget providing a more comprehensive picture of the state of the economy and Treasury thinking in advance of the Budget. All the matters that need not remain secret until Budget day could then be properly aired and discussed throughout the country, led by debates in this House.

I end this catalogue of agreement with the right hon. Member for Worthing by sharing his hope that, in considering the timing of the customary debate on the autumn statement, the Leader of the House will give the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service the opportunity to assist the House by preparing with its usual promptitude a report on that very complex and difficult document.

The complacency of the Chancellor's autumn statement, to which many Members on both sides have referred, has been widely attributed to a supposed desire to soothe and reassure investors before the flotation of British Telecom and to do nothing which might upset that enormous operation. There may be something in that, but I believe that two other important factors contribute to the pronounced smugness of the autumn statement.

First, this complacency reflects the fact that the Chancellor knows that he has nothing to fear from the Labour segment of the Opposition, and that was made crystal clear this afternoon. He knows that he can get away with it, as the Conservative party did at the 1983 general election, very largely because of the lack of firm and convincing opposition from the Labour party. That smugness is also due to the fact that the tasks that the Chancellor chooses to set himself are substantially irrelevant to the plight of our economy. He is playing a game with targets that may give him satisfaction but do not belong to the real world. He fixes his eyes, at present with great satisfaction, on the state of the money supply and the prospects for the public sector borrowing requirement. Both of these are, from time to time, important indicators for a Chancellor of the Exchequer, but, as the supreme targets of economic policy, they are wholly unsuitable. In our view, the Chancellor should have as his targets the three main aspects of the economy, which are the growth of GDP in money terms, the rates of interest, and the sterling exchange rate. For a Chancellor to repeat continually the idea that he does not need to have a policy or targets for the sterling exchange rate is the depth of unreality. We need targets that, among other things, have a direct and manifest relation to the rate of unemployment.

As to policies aimed directly and specifically at relieving the unemployment problem, but with other benefits as well, I draw the attention of the House to some conclusions in the recent report of the EEC Commission to the Council of Ministers. It is an annual report, published only a fortnight ago, and traditionally it reports on the economic situation throughout the Community and suggests economic policy guidelines for member countries. As one would expect from its source, the report is prepared by people who are keenly aware of the dangers of reviving inflation, and who are in no sense madcap expansionists airing some dogma of their own. They believe, and make it clear, that the time has come for some expansion and selective reflation in the major economies of the Community.

For instance, referring to the growth rate — and incidentally without reference to the particular complications of the coal strike, which is affecting our growth rate —it says:

"when combined with measures to increase the trend of growth of potential output, an actual growth rate of 3½ per cent. to 4 per cent. might conceivably become possible for a period . . . With a more favourable pattern for economic growth, it should be possible to achieve a substantial annual growth of employment . . . Programmes of public investment should be strengthened, especially in countries whose public finances have been adequately consolidated and where the construction sector is underutilised."

That last point is clearly addressed to the United Kingdom, among other countries.

At the moment, a large number of important industries —industries that we cannot forgo—are in great danger of serious contraction because they have such slender order books. It is nonsense that industries that require teams of skilled workers accustomed to doing complicated work as teams and industries that require a high degree of technical management should be left in the doldrums, contemplating widespread redundancies because of an unnecessary shortage of orders from the public sector.

There is a danger that the House may share the Chancellor's complacency about housing, because so great were the fears that he might get away with an appallingly large cut in housing finance that there has been comparative relief at the announcement that the cut is to be just £65 million for next year. However, that in itself

is a shocking reduction in a crucial sphere of public investment. The National Home Improvement Council reports that 4·3 million dwellings in England are in a poor condition and need repairs costing on average £2,500 per house. That is 21·7 per cent. of the housing stock in England; and there are many more examples and further figures for Scotland and Wales. I quote that simply as an example of a crying need in the economy that can be met at a low import cost by skilled people who are available but who are in danger of being left idle.

What perpetually seems to pervade Government statements is the idea that in some way public investment should be sharply differentiated from investment in the private sector. I do not see why that should be so, because the overwhelming consequence of an increase in public investment is orders to the private sector. There are few parts of the public sector that construct their own capital works or attend to their major projects in-house. The overwhelming amount of public investment directly means orders for the private sector. Therefore, I do not see why there should be doctrinaire stigma attached to public investment, especially by the Chancellor, who seems to rejoice in private sector investment flourishing and public sector investment declining.

The aspect of the autumn statement that we criticise most is the repeated hammer blows at public sector spending. Implicit in the words of the statement is that in education, the housing stock and many other spheres of local government, there will be reduced capital expenditure. In paragraph 1.43 the statement says:

"The rapid growth of private investment is likely to be offset in part by lower public investment".

That is poor stewardship, as well as an unnecessary addition to the risks of even higher unemployment.

The assumed rate of unemployment for 1985-86 in the Government's publication must mean that, in addition to the high cost of unemployment benefit and of PAYE forgone, we are losing as a community at least £20 billion worth of goods and services that could have been produced by the unemployed. For the Government, with apparent equanimity, to instruct the Government Actuary that he must account for at least 3 million unemployed for the financial year 1985-86 is a dreadful admission of failure.

I despair most at the Government's unwillingness to accept any real responsibility for the unemployment position. It is against that background that my right hon. Friends and I, and our friends in the SDP, will vote for our amendment tonight.

7.9 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): The economy will be judged not by what we say about it but by its performance. The words "output" and "productivity" do not merely mean producing things, nor just a return on capital or labour. They contain elements of all those but require the added yardstick of efficiency and effectiveness. In addition, innovation, competition, marketing, advertising, production engineering, quality control and design, the practical application of new technology, including information technology, are all part of the general package of effective output and productivity. But human motivation and the enthusiastic interest of those at every level in British industry surely remains at the centre of gravity of wealth creation, even in the age of robotics.

Output and productivity of the highest quality of goods and services which people want and need and buy so that profits can be made to finance new investment, pay justifiable wages and create more growth, combined with the remarkable and successful policy of the Government in containing inflation, must be a first priority in the economy today, accompanied by the incentive to achieve it.

Money to pay for reasonable public expenditure and wages and to help those in need cannot be conjured out of thin air, nor can companies, including those which have been privatised, survive and prosper unless we are competitive and successful in world markets with a firm domestic base. That means that we must sell more and better products and services than our rivals abroad, including the United States and Japan. That is a matter of great importance in my constituency of Stafford which includes important exporting companies such as the General Electric Company, British Reinforced Concrete, Universal Grinding and Evode.

What we lack in the availability of those natural resources which we have to import we must make up for in the quality of what we produce and in keeping to delivery dates, in reliability and design. We no longer dominate the routes and rules of international trade as we did in the days of empire. Pure free trade was then more of a possibility because we exercised control in so many parts of the globe. Today there is much more of a tightrope for British industry. We live by what we sell, but mere output or productivity, unrelated to quality and to what is needed or in high demand, will not enable us to pay our way in the world.

That brings me to the connection between incentives and motivation and the efficient production which must lie at the heart of our economy. We have a responsibility to future generations to develop our longer-term economic strategy on a basis which maximises the advantages of North sea oil but does not wholly rely upon it.

The skills, labour and inventiveness of British workers and management in businesses large and small are no less capable of being stimulated and revived today than ever before, but they need personal motivation and tax reductions throughout the work force from top to bottom, from the shop floor to the board room, so that there is an enthusiastic, real and personal interest in producing and selling high quality goods here and abroad. Therefore, I greatly welcome the Chancellor's determination to stay on course and to keep inflation down while allowing room for further tax reductions so long as they go across the board.

We often look across the world to Japan. We blame our management and exporters and the world recession, but Japan too imports a vast amount of its manufacturing materials. Japan's level of advanced technology and use of the microchip put us to shame. The microchip, with which labour has to compete in the present day, can be a potent source of new, small and larger businesses unless we allow the Japanese to dominate the market entirely. We must encourage mobility in our work force with incentives to train and to acquire skills in that sphere.

Education for schoolchildren and for school leavers and retraining schemes in the new technologies are being provided by the Government. The problem is that too often the opportunities are not taken up, or we find that dreadful sense of pointlessness which characterises so many young people these days and which they seem to acquire at school.

Greater emphasis must be placed on communicating the practical value of those opportunities and schemes. We

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need to be less on the defensive and to acknowledge that we live in difficult times with a significant change, as in the 1840s, in the nature of our economy and employment. Over and over again in past centuries we have as a nation faced up to that challenge and won through. I have complete confidence that we shall do so again, providing that we give those to whom the challenge is ever present the incentives and encouragement which they need to make the challenge a reality, and, in so doing, reduce not only taxation but the deadweight of over-regulation. I say "over-regulation" because some regulation is necessary, but our tax laws must be comprehensively reviewed to put emphasis on the making of profits rather than losses so that we can produce financial advisers rather than tax avoidance experts.

I am glad to note that the Chancellor has tax reform in hand. We can and must look across the Atlantic and learn some lessons from the United States in that area. The sheer volume and complexity of our statute book, compounded by subordinate and EEC legislation, is in itself a disincentive to enterprise and the creation of small businesses.

We need a radical review of our legislation to make it more responsive to people and simpler to understand and to apply. There is simply too much of it, and we underestimate the impact that it has on our economy and on the cost that is involved for public expenditure and for public administration. What people do not understand they may be inclined to disregard. That has dangerous implications for the rule of law. The black economy is not a healthy development; it is enterprise driven underground. Nor do I subscribe to Truck Act perks such as substitution for real pay with freedom to choose what to do with it.

The sum total of our economy is the efforts of the people. If productive effort is rewarded by lower taxation and the creation of new businesses, with lower interest rates, buttressed for the time being by North sea oil as we move from the older to the newer industries and services and invest in training and skills relevant to future employment, we could emerge by the end of the decade with lower unemployment.

With lower inflation and lower and simpler taxation, the pay packet will be larger and there will be a constant reminder of the relationship between pay and effective productivity and output. Of course, there is a real connection between wages and inflation, but lower taxation throughout every level of industry is the key incentive to containing wages reasonably and to increasing profitability and competitiveness. Lower taxation means higher real wages for more people in more businesses.

We need to relate wealth creation to what people do and think at work. The Third world indebtedness and the world recession make that problem more acute and the need for a practical response at home becomes more important. We need to encourage in our schools and elsewhere a new attitude of mind towards work. We can and must restore the confidence of those in the economy who produce the wealth, and we must provide every incentive to make that happen.

7.19 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Perhaps I have one thing in common with the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). I, too, have a GEC plant in my constituency.

Conservative Members' speeches have given the debate an air of unreality. Earlier, I listened to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's almost disgusting complacency about the state of the British economy. He seemed to be saying that, instead of our being in the midst of the most profound economic crisis to have occurred in the lifetime of almost every hon. Member, we were on the verge of the dawn of a new British economy. If the right hon. Gentleman is right, he is talking about an economy that exists only in very selective parts of the country or just in his own mind. If he came to the north-west or to the Manchester area, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland) has spoken, he would find, for example, that one in three of my male constituents are out of work. Half of those men, or some 17 per cent. of the total, have been out of work for more than a year. In Moss Side, one out of every two adult males is out of work. They do not believe that this economy is on the mend and they show no sign of believing that there is a bright future for them.

The hon. Member for Stafford spoke about the disillusionment of youth, but if a generation of children is brought up with literally nothing to look forward to—not even the end of the day, because they go home to poverty and to a future without prospects—it is not surprising that they should show the signs of apathy and disenchantment that he saw in our schools. That is the reality for many children in our inner-city areas and it is not confined to the north of England.

But the tragedy for areas such as the north is that they have become increasingly marginalised within the economy. We are now treated as economic residuals. When Conservative Members say that Opposition Members have no monopoly on compassion for the unemployed, their words have a hollow ring. Whatever their views may be about the intellectual undesirability of unemployment, we at least recognise it as something that concerns people and as something that therefore conditions the policies that we are determined to put into practice. This Government's policies do not recognise in any way that unemployment is a problem. It is something to be regretted and that can be calculated by looking at the number who are out of work.

In my area we do not even mind so much about new jobs. Often we would like simply to hang on to the jobs that we have. My constituency once housed the biggest industrial estate in the world, Trafford Park. Even now, under this job-creating Government, 19 jobs a day are being lost from that estate. Indeed, many more jobs have gone during the past four or five years.

Since coming to power, this Government have been caught up in the economics of prejudice and lack of choice. They have pretended that there was only one way of governing an economy and that was a way that did not allow for any social choice. We were told in 1979 that inflation was the major problem and that it could be solved by public expenditure cuts. We were also told that tax cuts would revitalise the British economy. By cutting public expenditure and squeezing the economy into abysmal

poverty of opportunity, the Government crushed inflation but at the same time discovered that there was no room for those tax cuts.

Perhaps I should congratulate the Government on their learning facility, because we now hear that they can no longer justify talk of tax cuts as an automatic solution, albeit they are still part of the Chancellor's package on a much more modest scale. Instead, we hear exhortations about wage cuts for those who already bear the brunt of the economy.

At GEC in my constituency 200 people are on strike, many of them because they are paid about £80 a week. That is a disgrace, given the work that they do. Their wages do not bear comparison with those in similar industries in the area and they have not had any pay increase for two years. If the idea of wage cuts worked, that factory and factories throughout the north, where labour rates are lower than in the south, would be bristling with economic activity, but as my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) and for Manchester, Central have said, that is not happening because wage cuts avoid the real question. It is interesting to note that the managing director of GEC, Lord Weinstock, had an income of more than £500,000 last year. Although his work force had no increase, he received an increase in excess of 15 per cent.

I would be the first to agree about the need for a new Beveridge report, but we also need to look at the real problem of the maldistribution of income and wealth in our society, in which the disgustingly rich exhort those on poverty wages to take even bigger cuts. That is the reality behind the Chancellor's exhortations to cut wages.

The Government do not recognise the real problems, or their total failure to provide demand within the economy. Even the Manchester chamber of commerce has come out with a report suggesting that about 44 per cent. of the firms sampled had a capacity utilisation of less than 90 per cent. Clearly, nearly half of the firms are waiting for the Government to put some demand back into the economy, as that would then produce jobs as well as goods and services for consumption by ordinary people.

Instead, the Secretary of State for Employment yesterday said that the level of demand was extremely enouraging. He said:

"The problem is the capacity of British industry to compete with overseas suppliers and to win back demand."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1984; Vol. 67 c. 400.]

Ironically, I might agree with him, because as the Government have destroyed many firms during the past few years and as there have been record bankruptcy levels, there will be real problems about supplying demand when demand increases. The would-be suppliers have been destroyed through the Government's deliberate actions.

The Government do not recognise the problems caused by the export of capital. In the first six months of this year, those great patriots in the City exported more than £7 billion. Not one penny of that will go directly towards creating jobs in the United Kingdom or towards producing plant, machinery or factories. Conservative Members talk about the need for investment, research and training. As I believe my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) said, manufacturing investment is about 26 per cent. below what it was when the Conservative party took power. Yet if we were to believe this Government and their glowing prospectus, the confidence of industrial investors should be sky-high. However, that simply is not so. Often, investment in manufacturing industry is only made to enable it to tick over. We are seeing disinvestment and reinvestment overseas. That is disastrous for this country's manufacturing base.

There is an appalling level of investment in research and development, and the situation has been made worse by yesterday's announcement by the Minister for Information Technology. He has said that there is to be a cut in support for research and development projects. Indeed, he said:

"no further application will be accepted for:

research and development projects from individual firms on standard support for innovation terms

development and investment projects under the microelectronics industry support scheme and the fibre-optics and opto-electronics scheme and

application, development and installation projects for flexible manufacturing systems and robots."

That research and development is needed. Ironically, because the scheme was successful the Minister has said that applications

"will be processed within the limited funds still available."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1984; Vol. 67 c. 87.]

Thus a cost constraint is being imposed on those valuable schemes at a time when we should be guaranteeing more money for them.

There are skill shortages even in the Manchester area. Over half the firms sampled said that there was a shortage of skilled and other labour. That is happening even in depressed areas. In areas of demand the shortage is much worse.

Since 1980 under this Government the north-west, which once relied upon the engineering industry, has lost nearly 20,000 engineering jobs. A report by the four county councils in the area refers to a mass exodus of jobs from the area. They prophesy that between now and 1987 over 100,000 people will be forced to leave the region, not because of a desire to get on their bikes, but simply because they will be driven out of the area in which they were born by the policies, lack of compassion, lack of understanding and lack of integrity of this Government when representing the interests of those who want a job. I am talking of those who have given a lifetime of work and wish to continue to work and of young people who see no future under this Government.

7.32 pm

Mr. Julian Critchley (Aldershot): I enjoyed the robust speech of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), although I fear that he will find my speech to be both wet and windy. However, it will be made with all the authority, not of a former officer in the Guards but of a lance-corporal in the King's Shropshire light infantry.

At least all of us who have spoken this afternoon will have escaped the slings and arrows of the scene writers upstairs, all of whom have been scribbling in another place. Not for the first time have the heavyweights on the two Front Benches been upstaged by the Earl of Stockton, the last of the great men. I did not hear his maiden speech, but, from what I hear of it, it should be required reading, for my Front Bench at least.

If nothing is done to reverse the inexorable rise in unemployment, the United Kingdom will be heading either for apathy or for social disruption. Let me place that at its lowest for the benefit of some at least of my hon. Friends. Unemployment is a fertile ground for the

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advancement of revolutionary Socialism. Unemployment is not simply a social or economic matter, but a political one of the utmost importance.

I have no wish to re-examine the Government's economic policy since 1979. I have no wish to go over all that awful dead ground, save to say that we have heard much less about monetarism than we used to hear. Monetarism was, of course, a policy which seemed insane when it was not hypocritical, and hypocritical when it was not insane.

I do not wish to minimise the difficulties ahead, but far too often the Government have given the impression—I use those words carefully—that they do not sufficiently care about the unemployed or about the plight of the less prosperous regions of the country. That impression has been strengthened in recent weeks by the Chancellor's washing of hands—for instance, on "Weekend World" a fortnight ago.

The Chancellor should look again towards the American example. He may still believe that the only role for Government is the removal of controls and allowing markets to work better, yet he knows that the Americans have done far better than us. This, he believes, is due to the greater flexibility of United States labour markets and greater mobility. There may be some truth in that. American workers are more mobile, possibly because one part of America looks much like another, but there is more to it than that. In America the money supply was squeezed between 1980 and 1981 and 1 million jobs were lost. Constraints were subsequently relaxed and unemployment began to fall swiftly without a return to inflation. Would that we had done half as well.

The Chancellor's assertion in the July debate that the Government's economic policy had been "vindicated by events" was the most remarkable statement since Hitler was accused of having missed the bus. The Chancellor rattled out a series of figures, but by sleight of hand he was careful to start from the second quarter of 1981 and not the second quarter of 1979. He left out the sad and sinister story of the radical decline in Britain's share of world trade. The balance of visible trade, excluding oil, has deteriorated by nearly £11 billion since 1981. *The Times* this morning describes the Chancellor as a "conjuror". From now on, let us have more hats and fewer rabbits.

What should be done? There is no easy way. A foot flat on the accelerator would bring about a financial and trade crisis and ensure a return to inflation. However, to do nothing more than is proposed would be to risk—I quote Lord Macaulay—

"The wreck of laws, the confusion of ranks"

and the

"dissolution of the social order."

I have two modest suggestions to make. We must have a modest further increase in Government spending. A restructuring of the national insurance contributions is needed so that they bear less heavily upon the lower paid, the elimination of national insurance contributions on new jobs, and a 1 per cent. overall cut. The cost of that would be £600 million over two years. Secondly, there should be additional Government spending on capital projects of about £900 million.

Speaking at the CBI conference, Mr. Roland Long, of International Harvester, said:

"The sad decline in manufacturing and rise in unemployment has been . . . linked and together they constitute the price which has to be paid for the Government's success in the reduction and control in inflation."

Yet some of those close to the Prime Minister still hanker after zero inflation. God preserve us from them. Mr. Long continued:

"and there will be no substantial fall in the number of the unemployed without the restoration and regeneration of manufacturing industry."

Amen to that.

Does the Prime Minister, after her many successes, wish to go down in history as the leader of the Conservative party who breathed new life into the old jibe that the Tories are the party of unemployment? I should not like to think so.

7.37 pm

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I do not know whether I need say anything after the speech by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley). The case that needs to be put against the Chancellor and this sterile Government has been ably made.

I listened with interest to the speeches by right hon. and hon. Members on the Government Benches. We agree on some issues at least. I agree in particular about the need for drug control. More money should be spent on that important fundamental problem. It is one of our gravest dangers. I recently visited Athens and discovered that the Greeks face the same problem. It is becoming out of control in western Europe and more resources should be devoted to it.

The Chancellor's statement yesterday is fundamental to today's debate. It demonstrates that the Government have no solutions to offer. In the limited time available, I want to discuss certain parts of the Chancellor's statement and the prospects for the future of the economy.

Like my hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland) and for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd), I wish to emphasise that when all the esoteric arguments in the Chamber have come to an end, the issue of unemployment is about the people in our constituencies. For those hon. Members who represent the fringe and marginal areas of Britain, unemployment is a severe problem.

I held a surgery last Saturday morning at the Lewis Merthyr club, Porth. The club is famous in south Wales, because it was the liaison centre of the sit-down strike of miners from the Lewis Merthyr colliery. They tried to save their jobs by locking themselves underground. A man of about 55 or 56 came to see me at my surgery. He was an ordinary chap, with nothing pretentious or special about him. He had served his country for five or six years in the Army, had then taken a job and raised a family. While talking to me he began to cry, which I found embarrassing. I am sure that most hon. Members would be embarrassed if a man cried. His anguish was caused by the fact that his 25-year-old son had never worked and had no prospect of working. The domestic tensions in the family had become too much for him. He was an ex-soldier who had fought, and perhaps faced death, for his country, yet he found it difficult to deal with unemployment in his family, and he cried. I had to tell him that I could do nothing for him, and the tears were not far from my eyes.

The same problem is faced by almost 40 per cent. of my constituents. I can weep for them, but I cannot offer any solutions. If the Labour party were in power I would

want it to take action. I only hope that the Government can bring themselves to do something for the son of that 55-year-old man, who could only cry. The man showed me a bundle of envelopes that had contained answers to job applications by his son. There has been a spirit among some honourable, or perhaps less honourable, Conservative Members that if a fellow was on the dole, he was lazy. I remember one Conservative Member saying, "There is no problem. Get on your bike and get a job somewhere else."

My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford suggested that his constituency might lose 100,000 people. Where will they go? South Wales exported people in the 1920s and 1930s to Slough, Reading, Coventry and the other new areas. But those new areas are now facing 20 or 30 per cent. unemployment. Where will our gipsies go now? Where will my gipsies from the Rhondda go? They have nowhere to go.

People talk of the miners' strike, the problems in the mining industry, Scargill, the boot boys, and so on. I do not approve of the mindless violence on the picket lines. Some people react with tears while others react in another way. There is frustration and anger among the people, and the Government must address themselves to that problem. They are frustrated and angry because they have nowhere to go—they have no hole to run to, there is nowhere that they can hide. The miners will be out of work. There were once 53 pits in the Rhondda, but only one remains. The level of unemployment among males in my constituency is horrendous. If they are given jobs, they will work. They worked hard enough during the 1914-18 war and the last war, when they sweated to produce energy. They are prepared to work now if the jobs are available.

Never before have I known people to strike for nine months and subject themselves and their families to enormous hardship for nothing. They are certainly not striking for money. I know a chap of 54 or 55—Ron Windos from Tonypandy. I asked him last week why he did not take his redundancy money. I asked him how much he would receive. He said, "With my service in the pit, I would get about £27,000 or £28,000." I said, "Why not take it?" He said, "That would be giving my job away." That is how the miners see the strike. They are striking not for additional pay or bonuses, but because they are concerned about jobs.

If the miners could get out of the pits and work elsewhere, they would so so. My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) comes from my valley. We do not know of one miner who wants to go underground. Any of them who could find a decent job out of the pits would do so. There is nowhere for them to go, and that is the shame of the Government. Are they a Government for people or for profit? The Chancellor this afternoon spoke about interest rates, juggling with money and finance. He used City jargon. He did not once mention people. It is no wonder that the people of Britain are becoming angry.

It used to be said that the Tory party was happy only if there were two people chasing one job. I was brought up on that dictum. The hon. Member for Aldershot said that he hoped that the Tory party would not again be regarded as the party of unemployment. I hope for that also. I want the Government to succeed for the sake of those whom I represent.

There has been a commonality of interest on issues such as the control of drugs, because that affects everyone and his children — my children, the Queen's children, anyone's children. When unemployment becomes the concern of the middle and upper middle classes, they might address themselves to that problem. I know that I am doing a disservice to many Conservative Members who are now attacking the Government because they view unemployment in the same light as I do—a scourge. I only hope that the Government will change their mind.

The Government's record in Wales is appalling. Since 1979 unemployment has risen from 80,000 to 180,000 —from 7 per cent. to 17 per cent. The number of jobs has decreased from 1,030,000 to 912,000 and in the manufacturing sector from 308,000 to 212,000. The number of employees in Welsh manufacturing industry fell by about one third between June 1979 and June 1984. More than 114,000 redundancies have been confirmed.

If the Conservative Government are not concerned with people, they might be concerned about liquidations, and over the past five years there have been about 52,000. Unfortunately, it is not possible to give separate breakdowns for England and Wales. That is an abysmal, shameful and shabby record. It is one from which no Government could derive pride. This is a Government of corrupt farmers selling off the seedcorn of the nation. I am distressed that the Government are eroding and destroying the tax base of Britain and that we shall be reduced to a level from which we shall never be able to recover.

I am not especially concerned about revolutionary Socialism arising from the wasteland that the Government are creating; I am concerned about the Fascists who rise out of unemployment. History demonstrates that out of unemployment rise jackbooted Fascist thugs. Recent history in Germany and Italy bears that out. I am concerned about Fascists, not revolutionary Socialists.

7.51 pm

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Loughborough): The speech of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) was one of great eloquence and passion. His passion has been aroused by genuine concern about the plight of his constituents, many of whom suffer from unemployment. I, too, shall concentrate my remarks on unemployment. The hon. Gentleman and I share a concern for unemployment that is shared also by many of those who have spoken in the debate on the Gracious Speech.

There is no doubt in the minds of the majority of hon. Members, or in those of the majority of our constituents, that the key issue on which the Government's record and our record as hon. Members in this Session will be judged, is the way in which we shall have tackled the problems of unemployment.

We have heard much about the problems of youth unemployment during the debate on the Gracious Speech. We have heard about school leavers who spend a year in the youth training scheme, feel that they are qualified to take a job—qualified for life—and find on leaving the scheme that there is no job for them. We have heard from the hon. Member for Rhondda about the 50-year-old who finds himself out of work, cannot find new work and discovers that, under the benefit system, he will be more or less destitute after one year of unemployment. He learns that the state will offer him no visible means of support after 12 months. My constituents often tell me that the benefit system is too generous. I tell them that if a person has been out of work for 12 months and has more than £3,000 in savings, he will be given no support by the state.

[Mr. Stephen Dorrell]

That comes as a surprise to many. Many of those who are aged 50 or more have no realistic prospect of work and there lies a concentration of the problem.

The hon. Member for Rhondda spoke about the concentration of unemployment in the regions, and he was right to do so. It is fitting that he should do so on the day when the Earl of Stockton made his maiden speech in another place. Unemployment in the regions was the issue that he made very much his own during the 1930s and many of his speeches of that period bear re-reading. All these issues come together in their most potent form when we consider the impact of unemployment on the coloured population. Some hon. Members may have seen a "Newsnight" programme that was shown a fortnight ago. It is staggering that 93 per cent. of coloured school leavers in Bradford this year have yet to find a job.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): What colour?

Mr. Dorrell: That is a reasonable question. I am talking about the Asian and West Indian communities, and especially the Asian community in Bradford. Hon. Members have addressed themselves to the issue during the debate and it is right that they have done so.

This session is critical if the Government are to be remembered as the Administration who did something about unemployment. If we allow the Session to pass and we arrive at this time next year without having taken real action to tackle unemployment, all the other measures in the Gracious Speech will have been long forgotten and, instead, the Session will be remembered as the opportunity that the Government failed to take to reduce the problem of high and dangerous rates of unemployment.

What sort of action can the Government take to tackle the problem? I can do no better than refer to the document that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has taken to referring to recently, the 1944 White Paper on employment policy.

Mr. Terry Davis: Has the hon. Gentleman read it?

Mr. Dorrell: I have indeed. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has referred to the passage in the White Paper that states that jobs are not created solely by Government action. Jobs are created by vigorous private sector entrepreneurs and there is no argument about that on Conservative Benches. But that is not the only statement in the White Paper. Its importance lies in the contents of the first paragraph, which explain that post-war Governments will regard themselves as committed to the maintenance of full employment. The historic importance of the document can be attributed to the fact that it sets out three preconditions for succeeding in maintaining full employment. Two of the preconditions will cause no stirring on the Treasury Bench. The White Paper observed that full employment would not come if we did not pursue policies consistent with sound money and efficient labour markets. There is no argument on the Conservative Benches about that.

If the White Paper is set in its historical context, its remarkable feature is not its emphasis on the importance of sound money and efficient labour markets. The Governments of the 1930s were not conspicuous for their disregard of those priorities. It is remarkable for drawing attention to a third element which was regarded as an essential precondition to full employment, the commitment which was placed on Government to manage demand to maintain a level of full employment.

It seems that "reflation" has become a dirty word and I shall not quibble about that and whether it is the word that should be used. If demand is managed, that must mean that the Government accept an obligation in some circumstances to reduce demand if there is a danger of overheating—perhaps that is not the primary concern at present—and in other circumstances to increase demand to maintain the principal objective in the first paragraph of the 1944 White Paper, the maintenance of full employment.

Many have argued that conditions are now so different from those of 40 years ago that the strictures of the 1944 White Paper have become irrelevant. Those who advance that argument say that we need to find different remedies. Have the proponents of that argument thought through what they are saying? I cannot see any important difference which renders irrelevant the cures which were advocated in the White Paper. Some of my hon. Friends say that new technology destroys jobs and that its introduction means that it is impossible for us to use traditional techniques to create full employment. It is true that new technology, like the generations of machines that went before it, is justified because it saves labour.

No manufacturer ever put in a new generation of machinery if it did not hold out the prospect of producing goods more efficiently than before. That does not set the new technologies apart from the previous generation of technologies. Going back to the industrial revolution, the only thing that could set them apart would be if there were evidence that the new technologies increased productivity and therefore reduced job opportunities faster than the generations of machines that went before.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer yesterday published evidence which showed that productivity is improving not faster than in previous years but more slowly. If those machines are the threat to employment that they are sometimes held out to be, is it not passing strange that as they are introduced the rate at which we increase our productivity is below rather than above its historical trend? Furthermore, one does not have to look at theoretical arguments about productivity rates; there is clear evidence in the experience of the past two years, here and abroad, that adequate growth creates jobs.

The experience of the United States has been mentioned, but we do not even need to look that far afield; we can look at our experience with our modest growth rates, because even in Britain, the relatively modest growth rates that we have enjoyed since 1981 have created jobs.

Our slow rate of job creation in recent years has not been the result of the new machinery, the new technology that is supposed to put us in such a different world. It has been the result, in my view, of the slow rate of growth and not the result of any change of conditions that invalidates the prescriptions of the 1944 employment White Paper.

If it is not the new technology which renders the cures of the 1944 White Paper irrelevant, we move on to the argument which is even more improbable that the problem today is not one of lack of demand and, therefore, is not a problem of demand management.

If it is not a problem of lack of demand, that would be news to some of my constituents, many of whom are

employed in traditional manufacturing industries where output is 5 per cent. down on May 1979. It is said by some that that is not evidence of inadequate demand. If it is not that, what is it? Some say that it is evidence that wages are too high. Those people would do well to read the speeches of the Earl of Stockton in the 1930s, because right through the 1930s Neville Chamberlain said that wages were too high. Right through the 1930s, the experience surely was that action substantially to reduce wages led into precisely the deflationary cycle out of which so many of the speeches of that time were designed to push us. We all recognise that if wage increases get out of control and the result is inflation, that is damaging to economic progress and job creation, but that is different from saying that the solution to today's problem is wage cuts.

The question, surely, that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and other Ministers must answer is not whether wage cuts would in some circumstances produce extra jobs, because we can argue for a long time about that. The more immediate question is whether additional demand introduced now in techniques espoused by the 1944 White Paper would produce extra output or extra inflation. That is the simple question that Ministers must answer.

Like many of my hon. Friends, my answer to the question is clear. I believe that my right hon. Friend can continue—as I argued in the Budget debate earlier this year and in debates before that—the process which his predecessor started before the last general election, not of radical expansion but of drip-feeding the economy into higher growth rates. As he decides whether he can do that, I ask him to consider the fact that as Chancellor he has the opportunity, whether by tax cuts Reagan-style or by spending increases Labour party-style—in his terms it is relatively immaterial whichever way he does it — to channel demand, but not into the odd sectors where there is evidence of bottlenecks. No one can surely argue that there is a bottleneck in the construction industry, and if there is none what then is the restriction on channelling some additional demand into that industry in the same way as my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary did just before the last election?

As my right hon. Friend is considering his answer to those questions, I hope that he will be prepared at some time during the course of the next few months, as he develops his Budget strategy, to put away the textbooks and technical papers and ask himself, as a reasonable man, whether it is reasonable to argue that an economy with 3·25 million unemployed people and a low and stable rate of inflation is so hidebound by capacity restraints that it must retreat next year from the dizzy heights of an underlying 3·5 per cent. growth rate in the current year —disregarding the effect of the miners' strike—to the safe and familiar ground of a 2·5 per cent. underlying growth rate next year.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor might like to heed the advice of Mr. Jack Kemp, a possible Republican candidate for the Presidential nomination in 1988, who is reported in yesterday's *Daily Telegraph*. Mr. Kemp is not famous in the United States as a Liberal, but when asked what he thought the new Reagan Administration would do about the economy he said:

"The mandate Reagan got was for Reaganomics—growth, not cutting the deficit. Cutting the deficit is what Mondale ran on."

That is, perhaps, an interesting comment on the scene that my right hon. Friend would like to consider.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley) averted to the fact that today has seen the maiden speech in another place of my noble Friend the Earl of Stockton. I should like to conclude by reminding the House of a speech about unemployment that he made in the 1930s. He referred to Disraeli who said in a famous phrase that the keys of India lay not in Kandahar or Herat, but in London. So it is with unemployment. The keys of unemployment lie not in Durham or south Wales but in Downing street and Threadneedle street.

8.7 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I am glad to have the opportunity of following the hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell) because among other reasons, he has the curious distinction — if that is the correct way to put it—of being a former pupil of mine. At least in his thoughtful speech, with which I substantially agreed, he spared us what we have become far too accustomed to in recent years, and that is the experience of hearing Ministers at the Dispatch Box trying to justify and explain what has happened and what has gone wrong by the selective use of statistics.

In view of the complexity of our economy and the great panoply of statistics, it is by no means impossible for the diligent researcher, winnowing through all the available material, to come up from time to time with statistics that support almost any view. By the careful selection of base dates and the use of percentages rather than absolutes, comparing like with unlike and so on, Ministers no doubt feel that for the purposes of any debate they can produce figures and arguments which satisfy the needs of the moment. I doubt whether anyone in the House of Commons is convinced by that type of argument. We heard an excellent example of it this afternoon from the Chancellor.

First, it is easy enough to set aside those little sweepings of statistics on the margins, and to invite Ministers to confront the central importance of the maze of statistics — those about our output, trade and investment, and most of all those about unemployment. That has been done so often that even Ministers must know the truth and importance of those terrible figures.

Another way of rebutting that statistical sleight of hand is open to any member of our society who looks around him in Britain today, particularly if he is able, by virtue of foreign travel, to compare the way in which other societies are confronting similar problems. Inevitably he will conclude that Britain is poorer, scruffier and shabbier. It has failed to arrest its economic decline and has started to run out of faith, hope and confidence in itself. It has a society that is turning in on itself, demanding sacrifices from those least able to make them. It has a lower level of public services and it does things worse than other countries. After looking around the world, I find that it is a society that is almost a byword for failure.

That is the reality that lies behind the Government's false claims, the Prime Minister's vainglorious posturings and the Chancellor's complacency. It is a reality that Conservative Members know as well as Labour Members. That is why we are increasingly hearing a chorus of demands from Conservatives for a change in policy.

The "ship of state" is a familiar metaphor, but our ship of state, under its present command, is like an aging

[Mr. Bryan Gould]

passenger liner whose paint is peeling and whose engines are belching smoke and on which we are heading for the rocks. On the bridge is the Prime Minister, the captain. She appears to be unaware of us. She is enjoying wearing the uniform. She is told by her mate, the Chancellor, not to worry about the impending disaster—the fact that we are heading inland instead of out to the open sea. He says, "Don't take any notice of the course that has been plotted or of the facts and figures that show that our speed and direction are leading to us running aground. We are, believe it or not, heading for the open sea, and the last thing we must do is change course, repair the engine or provide some more fuel."

The Chancellor says, "If we happen to run aground, there is an easy remedy. We have been using that remedy for five years now, and no one so far has been worried too much, at least on our side. The remedy is that, as we get into shallow waters and the disaster is impending, we merely jettison a few skilled crew and a few essential bits of equipment. We shall float off the sandbank—don't worry too much about it. The last thing you must do is listen to the creaks and groans from the shuddering ship, the cries of pain and the sounds of conflict from those on board." That is the reality of the Government's economic policy.

There is a growing realisation not just among Conservative Members but throughout the country—not least in industry—that the Chancellor is finally running out of options and excuses. I believe that the Chancellor senses that also, and that is why he is scraping the bottom of the barrel. He knows that his somewhat quixotic interpretation of success stories around the world, not just in America but in many diverse countries such as Australia, Sweden, Japan and Austria, will not convince many people. The Chancellor, however, persists in the unlikely argument that their success is due to real wages. He seems unaware of the fact that if he succeeded in convincing people that that is the course that we should follow, he would announce the final denial of hope and confession of failure.

The Chancellor's problem is that he continually says that any attempt to grapple with unemployment will be self-defeating. In his own terms, that is true, because he postulates a completely unchanged monetary polciy. As long as the Chancellor's monetary targets remain sacrosanct, there is no escape from increasing unemployment. What is true of the remedies that the Opposition would pursue is true also of the remedy to which the Chancellor points. No solution will be found by cutting real wages if the Chancellor does not insist on adhering to the other aspects of his policy.

Let us assume that the Chancellor could persuade people that cuts in real wages were necessary. I concede immediately that the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that we must improve our international cost competitiveness, which has declined substantially under this Government, despite ministerial rhetoric about the constant need to improve. Incidentally, it always strikes me as odd that Ministers continually disclaim responsibility for the shocking decline in our manufacturing trade performance, because they say that it is the inevitable consequence of North sea oil; yet, at the same time, they argue that we must improve productivity and competitiveness, force down wage costs and so on. What would be the point of achieving those difficult changes if no improvement in our trade performance were possible?

Such failures and lapses of reason underlie much of the Chancellor's current policy. If the Chancellor were to try to resolve his difficulties by forcing down real wages, almost certainly he would not succeed. If 3 million-plus unemployed are not sufficient to force down wages, one shudders to think how many more jobless we need and how much more social bitterness we have to endure before wage rates fall. Even if the Chancellor could, by some miracle, force down wage rates, how many people would believe that he could do it sufficiently quickly and effectively to close the gap on our competitors, whose unit wage costs are falling because of expansion, not contraction? The Chancellor concedes that their wage unit costs are falling. It defies all credibility to believe that we could force down our wage costs by contraction and compulsion to a degree sufficient to match the effort made by our competitors and catch the train that is leaving the station.

Let us go further and assume that, despite all those difficulties, the Chancellor is able to cut real wages. The Chancellor says that, if only real wages had been 1 per cent. or 2 per cent. lower, many hundreds of thousands of jobs would have been created. From where would those jobs have come? There would have been no increase in effective domestic demand, no stimulus to output or additional resources to finance more jobs. Nothing would have happened in the domestic economy that would conceivably have provided the resources to provide a single extra job, simply on account of cuts in real wages.

The Chancellor might argue that the improvement in our cost competitiveness would create new export markets and that that is where the increase in output would come. The Chancellor must know that, with an unchanged monetary policy, any improvement in competitiveness to improve our balance of payments would be immediately counteracted by a rise in the exchange rate and negated by an appreciating rate for the pound. Any temporary benefit to investment, output and employment would be quickly stifled. That would be entirely in accordance with the Chancellor's stated policies. There would be no solution to the problem. Not a single extra job would be provided from domestic demand. There would be no solution from increased demand from abroad for our goods.

Where will the Chancellor find the increased resources to create the additional jobs? He certainly cannot look to a further fall in the savings ratio, because that is already at its lowest point since 1971. Even if the savings ratio fell further, the Chancellor would find that, by his policies, he had achieved no solution. He would still have had to fund the PSBR and pull in funds from abroad by raising interest rates, and that would mean dearer money and a higher exchange rate. So again the Chancellor would square the circle and box himself into a contractionary policy.

The Chancellor's predicament is increasingly recognised. That means that the days of the Chancellor and his policies could be numbered. It is significant that he lost his battle in the Cabinet a week ago and that he was able to sustain his position only by virtue of what all the commentators called creative accounting and relying on windfalls. It is significant that he did not, so one is led to believe, enjoy the full support of his own Prime Minister. The example of the American economy is simply too

overwhelming to be ignored, not just in economic but in political terms. Within a year, when we shall be halfway through this Parliament, literally dozens and scores, if not hundreds, of Conservative Members will start to say to themselves, "Can we win the next election? Can we hold our seats without a change in policy?", particularly when they have the glowing example of a Right-wing American President sweeping to a virtually unprecedented victory on the strength of policies which, so far, have been anathema to the Conservative Government.

The one glimmer of hope on the horizon that I see is that those pressures could induce the Prime Minister to consider a change in policy. For her, the fact that the Chancellor is so closely associated with the present policy could be a bonus because she could announce the change by replacing the Chancellor with someone more amenable and less committed to the existing disaster.

The tragedy for the Chancellor—perhaps I should not express any sympathy for him personally—is that we are constantly told that he is an intelligent man. If he is as intelligent as his admirers lead us to believe, he must know that his options have been closed and that he has nothing further to offer. He also has the experience of having engineered successfully a recovery on a previous occasion. He did it in 1982-83 as a pre-election manoeuvre. He did so in very clever ways — by overfunding so that the money supply looked to be unchanged and then funnelling back to the private sector through the sale of commercial bills the money that he had apparently taken out of the money supply. Therefore, he knows how to engineer a recovery. He knows that his present policies cannot work. I believe that that is why his recent performance has been so bad. If he really is as intelligent as we are told and knows that his policies have failed, that would explain why he has so little to offer. That is why he can only continue to mouth the same old unconvincing platitudes.

If the consequences of the long, sad and disastrous experiment in monetarist policies is that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is to be sacrificed, I shall feel sorry for him, but it would be a tiny price to pay for restoring hope to the vast majority of the British people.

8.23 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who made an eloquent contribution to the debate. However, like so many contributions from the Opposition Benches, it was long on criticism and short on solutions. Without wishing to follow the hon. Gentleman too far down the route of seafaring metaphors, I should like to say that it was not clear from what he said whether he would rather the Government succumbed to the temptations of the Scylla of everlastingly higher public spending than to the Charybdis of giving in to the trade unions on every issue.

Not for the first time since I have been in the House, some of the most constructive contributions to the debate on the economy have come from Government Back Benchers. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley), who made a stylish contribution, I agree that the most urgent economic issue of the day is unemployment. I am sure that that view is shared on both sides of the House. Many hon. Members have stressed their personal experience in coming to that conclusion. I also believe that if we fail to solve that economic problem quickly, unemployment will become the most urgent social problem of the day.

I should like to refer to the speech by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). I am sorry that he is not present, but I shall say what I tried to intervene to say while he was making his speech, but he did not give way. I admit that I cannot even match the military distinction of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot, who is a former lance-corporal. My only connection with the services is that I was a humble cadet pilot in my university air squadron. In a way I am relieved that the hon. Member for Walton is not present, because I would have to tell him that it was the Cambridge university air squadron.

The hon. Gentleman attacked the Government for confronting the workers. I should like to ask the hon. Gentleman who is confronting members of the NUM who wish to go to work. Are they not being confronted by their leader, Arthur Scargill? I do not want to be too unkind to the hon. Gentleman, as we in the Conservative party have much to thank him for, because he contributed more than anyone else to the growth in the Government's popularity by his chairmanship of the Labour party conference.

Contrary to what the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said, I understand clearly the aims of the Government's medium term financial strategy. It is part of an overall policy designed to achieve a low and stable rate of inflation. That is an essential precondition for the creation of new jobs. Yesterday I rebutted the outrageous slur that the Government do not care about unemployment. They are certainly not using high unemployment as an instrument of policy, still less as an objective of their economic policy.

However, apart from inflation, there are two other essential preconditions for new jobs. The first is the proper control of public expenditure and the public sector borrowing requirement; the second is the achievement of a steady rate of economic expansion. The figure of 3·5 per cent. next year is modest, not excessive. I suppose that we can regard it as satisfactory, but only just. This year, we must not overlook the contribution of the miners' strike in cutting the rate of growth in 1984. That reduction in the growth rate has been a means of destroying other workers' jobs. I hope that the leader of the NUM is aware of the damage that he is causing to fellow workers.

I approach the subject of unemployment as an optimist. Like some hon. Members, I do not accept that technology means no return to full employment. Some 150 years ago, two thirds of the British work force worked on the land. Today less than 5 per cent. is on the land. If the pundits in the 1830s had foreseen that decimation of jobs in agriculture, undoubtedly they would have predicted vast unemployment. Yet during that space of 150 years, when there have been huge advances in technology, the work force and employment have increased manyfold. Therefore, as my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell) said, technology can be the creator, not the destroyer, of jobs.

For that reason, and also because of the forthcoming demographic changes that mean that after the next 30 years the number of people of working age relative to the number of people of retirement age will go down sharply, I do not support fashionable schemes for encouraging early retirement and lowering the retirement age. In the first place, such schemes are not terribly effective because their

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

proponents acknowledge that for every two people who are forced to take early retirement, the best that one can hope for is one new job for someone coming off the unemployment register. Secondly, such schemes are expensive in terms of extra pension costs, and the resources needed for them would be better used elsewhere.

It is generally agreed that there are three causes of unemployment. The extent to which one believes that any one of them is dominant depends on one's political viewpoint. The first is the cost of labour; the second is macro-economic policy, particularly the level of public expenditure as it relates to the amount of demand in the economy; and the third comprises the non-financial obstacles to employment, some of which were referred to yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. I wish to concentrate on the first two causes, because the Government can act on both those fronts without abandoning their responsible fiscal and monetary policy.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has often stressed the cost of labour as a principal cause of unemployment. In our debate on unemployment two weeks ago, he said that a 3 per cent. real increase in wages could have cost 500,000 jobs, and his analysis is supported by academic research at the London School of Economics into the inelasticity of employment relative to real wages.

The Government could reduce the cost of labour by cutting employers' national insurance contributions. It is becoming fashionable to advocate tinkering with the contributions, but I believe that it should be a priority for the available cash — we were told yesterday that it would be £1·5 billion, but let us hope that by the time of next year's Budget it proves to be more than that—to be used to cut employers' national insurance contributions. That is far more urgent than tax cuts, which are not in great demand now that we have got rid of the confiscatory rates that we inherited from the Labour Government. Tax cuts for individuals are not such a high priority, because they do not directly affect job creation.

Employers' national insurance contributions are 10·45 per cent. of wages up to £13,000 a year, and the contributions total £11·68 billion per annum. A 3 per cent. cut would cost about £3·3 billion, of which £1·2 billion is already borne by the public sector. The net impact on the public sector borrowing requirement would be only just over £2 billion — not much more than what the Chancellor hopes to have available next year.

If we assume no increase in public sector employment, the consequence of such a cut in the employers' national insurance contributions could be the creation of 300,000 private sector jobs. The cost of unemployment, in terms of benefits and lost revenue, is more than £5,000 a year for each unemployed person. Therefore, the creation of 300,000 more jobs could produce an eventual saving of £1·6 billion. Therefore, the net final cost to the PSBR would be little more than £500 million.

Of course, there would be a time lag of perhaps two or three years before the full effects were felt, but some impact should emerge in the first 12 months and, if the policy proved acceptable, the trick could be repeated in 1986 and 1987 and, with one final heave, the whole of the employers' national insurance contribution could be phased out before the end of this Parliament.

Mr. Gould: Why is the hon. Gentleman prepared to concentrate help on the employers' national insurance contribution? Why should it not be concentrated on the employees' contribution? That would have the great advantage of producing a substantial increase in take-home pay at no inflationary cost, which is one of the major factors in the American recovery.

Mr. Yeo: I accept the hon. Gentleman's analysis of what would happen if cuts were concentrated on employees' contributions. Our priorities reflect our differing views of the most effective agent of job creation. I believe that reducing the costs of employers will create jobs more quickly. The hon. Gentleman presumably believes that putting more money into the hands of the workers will produce the same result by increasing demand. There is room to split the cuts according to our individual viewpoints.

The abolition of employers' national insurance contributions would have the incidental advantage of allowing us to do away with the national insurance system —the contributory principle was abandoned many years ago — and employees' contributions could be merged into income tax without any change in take-home pay. Getting rid of the national insurance system would produce an administrative saving of £100 million a year.

As regards the second cause of unemployment, I do not advocate huge increases in public expenditure, but there will be continuing dismay at the restraints on expenditure on house building and home improvements. Those are particularly labour-intensive activities which have low import penetration and a far greater job-creating potential than many other public sector capital projects.

The Department of the Environment's spending on housing has been trimmed in the autumn statement to £2·3 billion, which, even after making the necessary adjustments for capital receipts from the sale of council houses, is quite a lot lower in real terms than the 1979 figure. I hope that the Government will soon reverse that decline. If resources are needed from elsewhere to finance a return to higher spending on housing, we need look no further than the suggestions made in yesterday's excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Hordern), who referred to the regional grants of £600 million, spending on agriculture, and so on. I cite those examples for illustrative purposes.

I support the Chancellor of the Exchequer's efforts to switch from taxes on income to taxes on spending. That is the right way to go, but I must point out that charities are the one category that is exempt from income tax but not from spending taxes. It is odd that a Government who are so committed to a partnership with the voluntary sector should continue to penalise charities by switching taxes without giving those charities any concession.

However, that switch is only one aspect of tax reform. Another equally urgent aspect is the need to integrate income tax and the social security system. Tinkering with either component in isolation will merely produce more anomalies and complications. I hope to see a commitment to that vital reform in next year's Queen's Speech, by which time the results of the social security reviews put in hand this year will be known.

I make a plea for one other small tax concession that would be completely self-financing. I suggest that individuals who wish to employ people in a personal capacity and take someone from the unemployment

register should be allowed to set the employment costs against their income tax. By definition, that would be a self-financing concession, and I believe that it would be a small but helpful move towards new job creation.

The Queen's Speech makes no mention of an important contribution to tackling unemployment that would carry no public sector cost. It involves the mobility of labour, which has been an important but often overlooked factor in the American success in job creation.

The new jobs in America are being created not in the old industrial heartlands; they are down in the sun belt. There has been a huge movement of the working population and that process has been facilitated by the availability of accommodation. We have been hampered for decades by the immobility of our labour force, which has been an obstacle to job creation. I believe that that immobility will continue.

Mr. Michael McGuire (Makerfield): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the move from the industrial areas in the United States came about as a result of anti-trade union laws? The jobs have been created in what are known as the right-to-work states. The laws were a way of getting at the unions and making them weaker. Perhaps that is why that example appeals to the Tories.

Mr. Yeo: If it is true, which I doubt, that anti-trade union laws have created millions of new jobs in America —and Opposition Members have frequently cited the American experience as a good example for the Government — perhaps our Government have been derelict in their duty by not bringing in tougher anti-union laws.

We lack suitable accommodation for employees who seek jobs in different parts of the country. The council house system——

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): There is a vast difference between the economic and geographical situation in the United States and that in Britain. In America one can travel thousands of miles in order to obtain employment, but in our tight little island people who have been advised to move away to other regions often find the same situation prevailing there as at home. The hon. Gentleman's parallel between the United States and Britain is erroneous with regard to the movement of labour.

Mr. Yeo: The parallel has been cited more frequently by the Opposition than by the Government. It is the Opposition who hold out the American example as a useful one. I think that the parallel about the movement of labour is fair. Indeed, with a smaller country, it should be easier to move from one region to another.

If there were a proper private rented accommodation sector, there would be places for people to move to in their search for jobs. It is not true, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) suggests, that conditions are the same wherever one goes. I am surprised to hear an Opposition Member make that suggestion. One of the Opposition's criticisms—and it has some validity—is that conditions in the north are very different from those in my constituency and in many parts of the south-east, where jobs are available but there is no accommodation. The Government could repeal the Rent Acts at no cost to the private purse, and we could then start to recreate the supply of accommodation. Many property owners, who at present are afraid to offer accommodation for rent, would be willing to let parts of their houses or flats. We would release to the economy a quantity of new resources not at present usefully employed. Greater mobility between regions is an essential precondition to reducing unemployment. I ask my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Employment to urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to introduce the necessary legislation in the coming Session.

I have summarised the measures that I believe would reduce the level of unemployment. I commend them to the House and, in particular, to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, especially as they would in total leave next year's public expenditure at £132 billion.

8.43 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): Neither the Queen's Speech nor the Chancellor's autumn statement holds out anything for my constituency, which at present is suffering an overall unemployment level of over 25 per cent. and where in large areas it exceeds 50 per cent.

It is evident from the speech of the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) that he has no comprehension of the problems and the hardship faced in the northern inner cities. The solutions which he has just pronounced show that he has little or no understanding of the problems. In the Sheffield, Central constituency about 10,300 people are unemployed, and the deprivation has to be seen to be believed. The only actions that the Government are taking are compounding the problem. The unemployment figures that I have given are the official figures. They do not include all the unemployed. Many people, especially married women, are now being denied the opportunity to take part in community programmes, and old people are being deprived of an extra pound in connection with the heating allowance. The Government are continuing to attack people in the most deprived regions.

Hon. Members may remember that Sheffield was once famous for its steel industry. Two years ago, the Government decided to embark upon the denationalisation of that industry by means of the development of the Phoenix schemes — part private and part public. We were told that that was the way forward, the new formula for privatisation and the panacea for the ills of the industry. The Government brought in Mr. MacGregor—the man who has committed 100,000 steel workers to the dole queue in the past five years.

I draw attention to the role of Mr. MacGregor in the Phoenix schemes, and particularly Phoenix III. On Saturday, an exclusive report in the *Morning Telegraph* said that Sheffield Forgemasters—which is Phoenix III —was on the brink of disaster. According to the report, Mr. Scholey, the chief executive of the British Steel Corporation, had made an announcement to the Steel Industry Management Association. He had not told the workers at the factories concerned or indeed the management there. He announced to the association that the BSC would have to pick up the tab for paying the wages. That article exposed the situation, and on Saturday an article in the *Financial Times* entitled

"Forgemasters set to receive a major cash injection"

stated:

"A major cash injection at Sheffield Forgemasters, the engineering and special steels company formed jointly by the British Steel Corporation and Johnson & Firth Brown almost two years ago, is expected to be announced within two weeks."

[Mr. Richard Caborn]

That is the success story. Two years ago the employers — not the trade union side but the employers — were pleading not to be forced into a shotgun marriage between the private and the public sector. They believed that that was the wrong way to approach a major sector of the industry. Nevertheless, Big Mac came in. The industrialists — not the trade unions, though they had their point of view—said that the way in which he was insisting on the merger and on developing that part of the steel industry was doomed to failure. Mr. MacGregor persisted. Two years later, when he has gone on to be the butcher of our mining industry, 100,000 jobs have been lost in the steel industry. That situation should be compared with that of the steel-producing countries of the EEC. Mr. MacGregor forced a privatisation against all the advice. Two years later the banks have to go in with a rescue operation and the BSC announces that it will have to pick up the tab.

This sector of the British steel industry supplies the nuclear industry and aerospace, and provides the open die forgings which are an extremely important part of our industrial base. If we are to develop the high-technology industries and if we are to move into new markets in aerospace, this is the type and quality of steel that will be needed. The destruction wrought on the industry by Mr. MacGregor could set it back by two to three years.

The *Morning Telegraph* is not famous for supporting the trade union movement but it states:

> "Hindsight is often patronising and arrogant, but there are many who often feared that Sheffield Forgemasters had been formed and was being operated on too tight a shoestring, given the huge problems of rationalisation and recession that it has faced from day one."

That has always been a problem of the steel industry, especially the private sector. The steel industry has also had to bear some of the highest energy costs in the EEC because of Government policy. It has also had to make substantial interest payments. In 1980, Aurora paid £6·7 million in interest, Hadfields paid £3·3 million and Johnson Firth Brown paid £9·7 million. That money could have produced a hell of a lot of jobs. If the money had been invested, especially in research and development, we should still have a fairly competitive edge.

I should now like to discuss Phoenix II. About two years ago Hadfields was the centre of attention. The Tories were crying out against pickets outside the gates saying, "Carry on working, lads: we will be right behind you." Hadfields is not only shut—there is hardly a brick of it left. That is the result of the help of the Tory Government who condemned people who were fighting for their jobs in the steel industry. The Government dare not announce the carve-up of Phoenix II because of the problems with Phoenix III and financial difficulties which arise not out of market share, management or the labour force but out of the financial structure that the Government forced through. Although the Government dare not announce Phoenix II, they have sold Hadfields down. Working miners should compare the promises that the Prime Minister gave at the Tory party conference and again last night with the promises that she gave to workers who crossed picket lines at Hadfields when they were asked to stand and defend their jobs. The Government's record on defending those who scab against their fellow workers in defence of their industry is appalling.

In the past four years Sheffield has lost about 25,000 jobs in the steel industry. The local authority's employment department has attempted, through innovation and consultation, to develop the local economy. It has developed about 20 co-operatives and created 1,000 new jobs. But what have we got from the Government who are crying crocodile tears about unemployment? They have condemned such initiatives that are now to be suppressed by rate-capping. The metropolitan counties, which have also tried to develop such schemes, are to be abolished. Successive hon. Members have talked about putting money into the economy — it is difficult to establish whether the Government are acting in concert with their Back Benchers. We have tried and trusted mechanisms which understand local needs, but when they try to generate local economies the Government, through legislation, by destroying the metropolitan counties and by rate-capping, destroy their initiatives.

It is time that the Government took basic manufacturing industries on board. Nobody denies that new technology must be accepted by trade unions and others, but industries such as the steel industry and basic manufacturing should not be written off as the Government are trying to write off many. Their performance in regard to the steel industry under the leadership of Mr. MacGregor has been appalling.

8.53 pm

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): Although I lack the advantage of being a member of the General Synod of the Church of England or a spiritual Member of another place, I should like to say something about the north-south debate in relation to the current state of the economy and its development as envisaged by the Queen's Speech.

Conventional wisdom is directed to increasing the divide between north and south. There is more than a grain of truth behind some recent expressions of concern. I was unable to hear the speech of the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland), but the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) made some telling points. I should like to remind him and others, however, that there is another side to the coin. It is not correct to allow people to believe that sitting at the northern tip of a prosperous south is an economic desert. I do not wish to deny that there are problems in the north of England, but it is after investment like everyone else and if we continue to beat our chests and to tell people all over the world how dreadful it is, who on earth will want to invest capital there and provide jobs for us? It is important to give the other side of the story.

The north-west has seen some of its traditional manufacturing industry decline, but it has done its best not to stand still. Any new industrial survey of the area would show our successful aerospace industry, new technology industries, important work being done in regard to the offshore oil and gas industries and heavy investment in the nuclear power industry. We have the new freeport at Liverpool docks and the finest airport outside London—Manchester international airport, which should also be a freeport. They are success stories for the north-west and they join the best of our older industries which continue to change with the times and are working hard and successfully.

The hon. Member for Stretford referred to a recent economic survey produced by the Manchester chamber of commerce and industry. In that connection I am reminded

of the old joke in which the optimist looks at a bottle and says, "It is half full," and the pessimist says, "It is half empty." There are two sides to the survey. Welcome improvements in deliveries and orders are shown in the report, as are booming home and export markets. There are better figures for manufacturing production. Some 56 per cent. of firms now work at or above 90 per cent. capacity compared with only 43 per cent. in June. General business confidence in the region has also shown a change for the better.

For the first time, the survey recorded a significant difficulty in recruiting skilled workers. The shortage of skills is noticeable throughout the country. It is surely at that that the Government are directing some of their youth and adult training measures. I refer right hon. and hon. Members who are worried about the expansion of public sector borrowing to the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym) who said where public expenditure could be used to good purpose. It is not enough for Conservative Members to say that all public expenditure is bad and for Opposition Members to say that all public expenditure is good. We should be able to distinguish between good and bad investment. Investment by the Government in the training of young people to meet skill shortages is good and we should not be afraid to say so.

I recently toured the youth training service in my constituency. I can only praise the work of the local authority and the sponsors who have produced more than a 60 per cent. success rate from the first 12 months' work. It is wrong to characterise the north of England as entirely derelict. If people there are doing their best to survive in difficult times, how much better they could do if they received a little more help from their friends in government. Although I appreciate the success of the north-west, it is impossible to disguise the appallingly low base from which that success is springing. Inevitable industrial changes in trade and technology have affected the traditional industries of the north-west, and given a boost to higher unemployment.

There is a perceived trend in the Government's economic policy, which is deeply worrying to people in the north. They wonder whether, while they fulfil their side of the bargain, the Government are fulfilling theirs. I refer to the continuing change between the manufacturing and service industries. The shift from manufacturing to service industries has not been kind to the north-west. Those setting up in the new service industries are not settling in as quickly as we would wish. It is proper that the economy changes with time and that market forces direct the Government to support what is best for the country as a whole, but it is not proper for Governments to consider that manufacturing industry has reached its timely end and must wither and die with their blessing. Although the manufacturing sector provides only 30 per cent. of jobs, it contributes nearly 70 per cent. of foreign currency earnings.

Some sectors of manufacturing industry can outstrip anything offered in terms of world competition, but they cannot defeat manufacturing industry subsidised by foreign Governments. The Government must make it clear to those in manufacturing industry that strong support is there not merely in word but in deed. I see nothing in the Queen's Speech to reassure me of that.

Britain cannot afford an economy entirely of services or entirely of manufacturing industries. There must, of necessity, be a balance between the two. The Government should be capable of discernment and of supporting the best of manufacturing industry without committing themselves necessarily to an industry which could never be competitive in any environment. The Government can do two things in particular.

First, in a review of areas of high unemployment and difficulty, the Government should examine industries in decline and those which are doing well. They should then consider what assistance they can give to allow those industries to do even better, because that is where jobs will be created. Perhaps the Government could think about collective reductions in national insurance in regional areas of high unemployment.

Secondly, the Government could take a wider view of their supportive role in industry. For example, for many years our heavy manufacturing industry has been at a disadvantage regarding energy costs. We know that the French have done well because of the nuclear element in their fuel supply. Surely we can produce a better deal for our intensive energy users. In France, energy policy is directed to producing the cheapest energy for the benefit of French industry. Our energy prices should not be directed towards providing the Treasury with a back door way to cover up its inadequacies.

The Government are right to look at some of their successes, notably the real reduction in inflation, as a stepping stone to future recovery, but they must beware of the language in which they couch the description of the recovery. To be told that we are in the fourth year of recovery with unemployment at 3·5 million, is a definition of an economic boom unknown to me. It is all very well to talk about it, but, as unemployment climbs in a constituency such as mine, optimism must be tempered with realism if the Government are to retain credibility.

Unemployment in the Bury-Bolton travel-to-work area is touching 17 per cent., which is the seventh worst in the north-west of England. To my sorrow and concern, I see my home town of Bury comparing itself with industrial wastelands with which it never before had anything in common. That is the basis of the anger in the debate between north and south and of the obvious anxiety expressed by the hon. Members for Stretford and for Manchester, Central. Unemployment is abysmal, and it is time the Government recognised the pain that hon. Members must endure in their constituencies when they deal with the problem. Whether the Government deny it or not, it is time they realised that many people are saying that some of the unemployment problem is their fault.

My constituents understand the kernel of good sense at the heart of the Government's message and know, because they are sensible, that a number of factors contributing to unemployment cannot be laid at the Government's door. However, they will look hard at those who continue to propound the wearing of the hair shirt of unemployment because somehow it is good for them. The Government must explain how wage cuts can be the next answer, when those industries in which there is competition for jobs are the unskilled low-wage industries. In industries where labour is not plentiful, the inevitable market forces work in the opposite direction. My constituents will be anxious to see what lessons the Government learn from the United States' experience. They will be anxious that the right lessons, not the wrong ones, are learnt.

My constituents will continue to try to understand the benefits of industrial policies based on sound money, but

[Mr. Alistair Burt]

in their heart of hearts they will want to see the Government wide open to every option available to reduce unemployment. Many of them were rehearsed in a thoughtful debate recently, and a number were spelt out in more detail in a recent book, "Jobs Ahead", written by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart), which is based on the work of the One Nation group.

My constituents will not demand to see the Chancellor perform miracles in the desert, but they expect him to be out there with his stick tapping at the rocks with a shrewd idea where the water might spring from. Above all, they echo the sentiment expressed so well yesterday by my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison)—they share the desire for taxation to be reduced as a result of efficiency but they are not at all sure that cuts in direct personal taxation should be a priority to the exclusion of all else. The clamour for reductions in taxation is declining as the number of unemployed rises and those fortunate enough to be paying tax look over their shoulders, fearing the day when for them, too, taxes will no longer be a problem. If the Chancellor can find £1·5 billion to be sensibly used before the next Budget, he would do well to consider all the options open to him to direct that money to the nation's most pressing problem. It is no longer sufficient for him to say that there is no alternative. There are plenty of alternatives.

My constituency and the north-west in general are composed of brave, hard-working people who have not stood still as times have changed. The industrial relations records of Bury, Tottington and Ramsbottom are second to none. People there have played their part and accepted the need to change their old industries. They are living up to their side of the bargain and they are looking for a sign that the Government have confidence in them. A wider perception of the Government's interventionist role and investment by the Government in the kind of industry and infrastructure that will truly boost the recover of the north-west will show my constituents that their sacrifices have not been in vain. Above all, they look for a display of open-mindedness by those in charge of Government economic policy and a willingness to seek all the options available to defeat unemployment, a fresh look at the PSBR and an understanding that, as times and conditions change, so, too, can economic policies and aims. All those things would be welcome and would reassure my constituents and others in the north-west that their problems are not just recognised but on their way to being solved.

In essence, it comes down to this. The Government must never lose sight of the fact that economic policy is only a means to an end, not an end in itself. If the Conservative party and the Conservative Government do not exist to improve the condition of the people in a variety of ways, through their handling of the economy and their all-round policy, they are out to achieve nothing at all. Conservative Governments — and this one is no exception — have a fine record of social reform, of following a variety of economic theories and of showing a pragmatic grasp of the aspirations of the people which has enabled them to retain the trust of the people. In the cause of material and spiritual advancement, economic theory is a fine servant of Governments, but it is a dreadful master.

9.7 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It is interesting to note the cool reception of both the Queen's Speech and the autumn statement by those who have hitherto acquiesced in every folly of the Government's economic policy. In so far as there was any economic message in the Queen's Speech, it received a very cool reception from Conservative Back Benchers who are at last beginning to realise that something is disastrously wrong. It also received a cool reception from that sycophantic body, the CBI, and the leaders of British industry, whose main economic preoccupation so far has been to clamour for more of the rod for their own backs and more of the machinery for the destruction of their own industries. Bought off with knighthoods and tax cuts, they acquiesced in all the Government's previous follies. Both those groups are now beginning to turn against what the Government are doing.

The worms are truly beginning to turn—a generic description from which I exclude the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), although he was certainly turning quite dramatically. The worms are turning because they see that the Chancellor is trapped. The Government's whole economic strategy has led them into a trap from which it is virtually impossible to escape—the trap of trying to talk up, by sheer pressure of exhortation, an economic revival which obstinately refuses to flicker into life while at the same time implementing policies directly harmful to any possible revival and to the productive manufacturing sector of the economy. The pound is still substantially overvalued against the currencies of our principal competitors, especially West Germany but also Japan. Our export prices as against those of West Germany are 45 per cent. higher than they were in the last quarter of 1976. It is almost impossible for British industry to overleap that competitive barrier in any circumstances.

Competitiveness is eroded still further as a direct result of Government policies, and the increase in the cost of power and fuel has become another burden on British industry — a burden amplified by labour costs. The Government have made a fetish of labour costs, but have not told us that, even under their policies, unit labour costs have increased by about 7 to 8 per cent. as against the last quarter of 1982. In the same period, in the United States, thanks to the expansion that has gone on there, unit labour costs have come down about 6 per cent. Unit labour costs have fallen in West Germany. In this country they have gone up, and that is a competitive gap that puts the Government in a trap. Either they allow the pound to come down, to erode that competitive gap, or they continue the long-term comparative decline that has gone on for so long.

The Government are also imposing the burden of high interest rates. Unusually, interest rates failed to come down, in their annual ritual, in time for the Tory party conference to allow the Government to give a little good news to their supporters. They could not praise themselves then because interest rates had not come down from the insane levels to which they were misguidedly increased in July. It is no good the Government claiming that the recent news on interest rates is good, because the real level of interest rates is still at an unprecedented level, and interest rates are a crippling burden on investment, industry and the whole economy. That burden will make it difficult for expansion to be resumed.

The Chancellor is trapped in the same cupboard in which too many Chancellors have been trapped—I do not mention their names because a number of them have been Labour Chancellors. Perhaps it is not a cupboard but a coalhole, because the Chancellor will almost certainly blame the miners for his problems, but the fact that he is trapped is inescapable. The tragedy is that the country is trapped at a far lower level of economic health and vigour than at any previous time, because of the enormous harm and destruction that have been inflicted on the economy by policies that have been directly harmful to its core—manufacturing industry. Manufacturing industry provides so much of our ability to survive, and it used to provide many of the jobs.

The harm that has been done makes it difficult for us to survive in the position to which the Chancellor has reduced us. He has taken us into his trap with a real level of unemployment of about 4 million. We are a net manufacturing importer, instead of the workshop of the world and the exporter that we used to be. He has taken us there as the balance of payments benefit of North sea oil has been frittered away into the predictable deficit position.

We are in that trap despite the examples of how to deal with economic difficulties that have been proffered to us by all too many countries overseas, which are either ignored by the Chancellor or described as manifestations of original sin. I give as instances Sweden, where a 16 per cent. devaluation has led to a substantial rate of growth and a fall in unemployment, Australia, where a 10 per cent. devaluation has produced both those results, and, more importantly, the United States, which is often quoted.

After two years of trying to implement similar fiscal policies to those of our Government, President Reagan reversed those policies. President Reagan is the only Keynesian economist left in the world who does not have grey hair because he has been following the policy of Keynesian expansion by deficit financing that many of us would wish to be followed here. The result has been the generation of 6 million real jobs which are paying real money to people to participate in the economic advance of their country by policies which the Chancellor tells us are impossible and directly harmful in Britain.

It is clear from that failure to learn from examples overseas that the Government's economic policy is now a busted flush. It is exhausted. Unless the policies are reversed—the Chancellor is not the most adept and flexible person at learning lessons and is not the most willing person to admit when he is wrong—all that faces the country and the Government is a prolonged downhill slide while other countries advance, prosper and grow.

The Government have given us the exact reverse of the policies that are necessary to deal with an economy in comparative decline, turning to absolute decline, as it was, as world trade faltered. They have given us confrontation where we needed corporatism; cuts where we needed Keynes; an export of capital on an enormous scale when we needed investment in the productive strength of Britain; high interest rates when we needed cheap money; over-valuation when we needed a competitive pound; and free market economics when we needed management, planning and growth. The only way out of that trap is to reverse the policies; otherwise, there will be a long three-year slide downhill for the Government.

9.15 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): We have come a long way verbally since, with customary glitter and glamour, the Queen's Speech was first read from the Throne in the other place a week ago. The debate that has followed has been wide-ranging. I would not wish for a moment to understate the importance of the debates on health and social security, local government and transport, nor on disarmament and foreign affairs, but it is only right to say that the main focus of the debate has been the state of the economy, both domestic and international, and, above all, the levels of unemployment in the United Kingdom.

We have had during the day a number of notable contributions to our debate. We heard the wise words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) on how to settle the long-standing mining dispute, or at least what attitudes of mind to bring to that solution—sentiments rightly echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). It will be well worthwhile for Ministers to study those words in *Hansard* tomorrow.

We have also had a timely reminder of the crucial importance of the international debt problem and what we all owe to the American economic expansion from the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins). We too easily fail to recognise just how much of the expansion in world output, including British output, which has taken place this year, we all owe to the American expansion. The right hon. Gentleman was right to say that that hectic pace of expansion cannot be sustained, that it would be wrong if it were sustained, and that, therefore, unless we in Britain and other countries of similar weight in the EEC are prepared to take up the baton of expansion, the world economy is likely once again to fall into a no-growth position, at any rate in 1985-86.

There is no prospect of Third world countries being able to carry the weight of the international debt which weighs so heavily on so many of them unless the markets of the western world are expanded. Otherwise, those countries simply cannot earn the exports and the revenues from exports which they need to service the ever-growing mountain of debt. The right hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym) made a striking contribution. He spoke for most Opposition Members and for many Conservative Members when he deplored the clipping and paring of overseas aid moneys and of other external services at a time when not only Ethiopia but much of sub-Saharan Africa face an historic catastrophe. He also hit a responsive chord when he rightly said in relation to Ministers' frequently expressed concern about unemployment that their action was not commensurate with their concern. The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley) made the same point succinctly, when he said that the Government give the impression that they do not sufficiently care.

On Thursday evening we tabled our amendment regretting that

"the Gracious Speech reaffirms policies which have already done severe damage to the British economy and will, in the future, further hold back the prospects of economic recovery."

Nothing that I have heard today from the Chancellor and certainly nothing that I have read in the autumn statement has given me any reason to change my mind about the relevance and accuracy of our amendment.

[Mr. Peter Shore]

What those damaging policies are is now all too familiar to hon. Members. They are policies to deflate the economy, and thus to run it at a far lower rate of growth of output and a far higher rate of unemployment than would otherwise be necessary. These policy aims have been achieved first by the imposition of money supply targets which have necessitated high interest rates. Secondly, those high interest rates have in turn encouraged a high exchange rate, thus making exports—except to the United States—more expensive and imports cheaper than they would otherwise be. Thirdly, deflation has been promoted by the continued cuts in public expenditure, cuts that have damaged the quality of community services and radically reduced capital investment in the infrastructure of our community. Fourthly, deflation has been pursued by a massive increase over the five years as a whole in total taxation — direct and indirect combined — with the greatest increases falling upon those with the smallest incomes, and the only reliefs being enjoyed by the very rich.

No country in the Western world had deflated more fiercely or, to use the technical term, tightened its fiscal stance more seriously, than Britain. Not surprisingly, Britain has suffered both the highest increases in unemployment and the lowest increases in output as a consequence. Those deflationary policies are restated in stark terms in the Gracious Speech in the following words:

"My Government will continue to pursue policies founded on sound money and lower public borrowing and aimed at securing a further reduction in inflation."

When those policies were first embarked upon, in 1979, it was the Government's contention that once inflation had been reduced, the economy would spontaneously resume growth and job creation. Prosperity and real jobs were, and according to the Government have always been, "just around the corner."

In November 1980, when unemployment stood at 1,600,000, the Prime Minister told us:

"We are reaching the trough of the recession and it will start to turn up towards the end of next year."

In the following year, in June 1981, the Prime Minister told the House:

"There are now clear signs that the worst of the recession is over."—[*Official Report*, 24 June 1981; Vol. 7, c. 332.]

Unemployment then stood at 2·5 million. In the Government's third year of office, in March 1982, the Prime Minister assured us, and an audience in Harrogate, that

"after three years of battling, we are beginning to see the regeneration of our economy".

Unemployment then stood at 2,900,000. In their fourth year of office, in May 1983, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was telling us:

"There is every prospect that by next year we will see the start of the fall in the level of unemployment."

Unemployment then stood at 3,100,000. Now, in the Government's fifth year of office, in September 1984, unemployment has reached 3,284,000, which is the highest figure ever reached in our history. It is higher even than in the very depths of the world recession in the early 1930s.

We are dealing not with one or two years but with five years of continued failure; of policies stubbornly and stupidly adhered to long after the damage and folly has been demonstrated to all. How fitting it is, therefore, that the Chancellor should end his speech today with the resounding affirmation that his was a "long-term" policy. How fitting it is that the Leader of the House, in a BBC interview about the Queen's Speech last week should conclude his remarks with the assertion

"patience is a great virtue in politics"

and

"in the long run we are all dead."

Against that background of unchanged deflationary policies, proudly reaffirmed in the Queen's Speech, and the scandalous level of unemployment, we must judge the sincerity of what the Government have to say about the plight of the jobless.

The Queen's Speech states:

"my Government remains deeply concerned about unemployment".

The right hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East will agree that concern is nothing if it does not lead to, or express itself in, action. The truth is that the actions required to increase jobs in Britain are directly contrary to the Government's main economic policies.

The Prime Minister, as evidence of her good intentions, has recently taken to quoting selectively from the 1944 White Paper on employment policy in Britain by the late Lord Keynes. At her conference in Brighton she had the impertinence to claim that the 1944 White Paper policies were basically the same as hers. When she opened the debate on the Queen's Speech a week ago the right hon. Lady tried again and quoted from the first and central paragraph of that White Paper to which she had previously not referred. She quoted from that paragraph in reply to a question by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) who asked her whether she accepted

"the primary aim of maintaining a high and stable level of employment."

In her reply the Prime Minister said:

"The first paragraph of that White Paper says that the Government should 'accept as one of their primary aims . . . the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment after the war'."

The Prime Minister went on to say:

"As I said at my own party conference, I accept most parts of this Paper — pretty nearly all of it except those aspects which over time have changed.

We would all like to return to a low level of unemployment."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 24.]

The Prime Minister failed to quote the whole of the first paragraph of that White Paper. It does not say:

"The Government accept as one of their primary aims the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment after the war."

It reads:

"The Government accept as one of their primary aims and responsibilities the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment after the war."

The right hon. Lady has sent me a note telling me that she cannot be here because she is entertaining the President of Finland. I regret that she is not here, because it is important that she should be aware of what she omitted to say and of my comments.

It is unbelievable that the Prime Minister should inadvertently delete that crucial word "responsibilities" when purporting to quote from the White Paper, because responsibility is the heart of the matter. It is at the heart of the White Paper. No Government before 1944 had accepted that responsibility. The dictionary definition of "responsibility" according to Chambers is

"a trust or charge for which one is responsible."

The same problem afflicted the Secretary of State for Employment when he tried to intervene in the speech by

my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) yesterday. In the debate on unemployment the Secretary of State said:

"I was asked by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) whether we had noted the first sentence in the 1944 White Paper. We have noted it, and I assure the House that we certainly want to see the highest possible employment level in this country". — [*Official Report*, 30 October 1984; Vol. 65. c. 1246.]

But to note is, once again, not to accept responsibility. We should ask the Leader of the House, who is to reply to the debate, the Chancellor and the Prime Minister, when she returns to the House on Thursday, whether the Government accept not only the aim but the crucial responsibility for the maintenance of a high level of employment, which was central to the 1944 White Paper and crucial to the whole economic policy of successive Governments from 1944 to 1979.

Let us consider what the Chancellor has said about responsibility for employment. Three weeks ago he was interviewed on television by Brian Walden. He was asked, as Mr. Walden put it, about carrying the can. The Chancellor replied:

"We have always made this clear what the Government can do to create jobs is very, very little indeed. It is largely a matter of how the economy works, which . . . in a free society depends on a whole myriad of decisions taken by the millions of workers, employers and managers up and down the country, that's what will determine how the jobs are. There is a little bit the Government can do to help them. What we can do we will do. But to fall into the error of thinking that the Government can determine the level of employment, that is totally false."

That is something that not only the Chancellor but the Prime Minister and the whole of the Treasury Bench believe. It is a convenient belief because, undoubtedly, a high level of unemployment assists the Government in keeping down inflation, in weakening the power of trade unions, in reducing pay claims and in redistributing income and wealth in favour of the well-to-do. Above all, that convenient doctrine exonerates the Government from blame and relieves them of their proper responsibility. But to describe these policies as stemming from the 1944 White Paper is a falsehood and a deception of the grossest sort.

There is a great hole in the middle of the Queen's Speech. The clamant problem of 1984 is the return of mass unemployment to our land. It has brought with it great suffering to individuals and communities, it has sharpened and increased industrial conflicts, it has actively destabilised our democratic system and it is alienating a whole generation of youngsters upon whom the brunt of the burden of unemployment has fallen. Yet the Queen's Speech has nothing to say that has the least relevance to their predicament. The autumn statement is, basically, a no-change document. As the document itself concedes, the present record level of unemployment will be sustained in 1985-86—the same appalling level as it has reached in 1984.

Since the productive potential of the economy is certainly not less than 2·5 per cent. per annum—that is the national increase in productivity per man at work—and as the predicted underlying growth rate in the autumn statement is 2·5 per cent., unemployment levels are bound to remain the same. If we are to bring down unemployment, and if the Government accept responsibility for a high and stable level of employment, we need a period of years during which the rate of growth is deliberately set at well above the productive potential, so that the unemployed total can be reduced. That is what has happened in the United States—a level of growth well above productive potential, well above the national increase in the labour force, and successful in bringing down the unemployment rate from well above 10 per cent. to just over 7 per cent. in less than two years.

There is plenty of room to discuss the pace and the pathway for the reduction of unemployment in the United Kingdom. However, that discussion will begin only when we have a Government who have the will and the wish to reduce unemployment and accept that they have a responsibility for maintaining a high and stable level of employment, and that will not be until we have got rid of the present occupants of the Treasury Bench.

9.35 pm

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): It is a week ago that the debate on the Gracious Speech and the Loyal Address was initiated with contributions of wit and perception by my hon. Friends the Members for Boothferry (Sir P. Bryan) and for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham). Since then the debate has been continued over a wide range of topics and today it has been set upon its concluding stages with a debate upon the economy that was initiated by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

I have had the advantage of listening to the most formidable troika of contributions from the right hon. Members for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) and for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym). I pay heartfelt thanks to them all for their collective efforts to prevent our occasion being entirely upstaged by the Earl of Stockton in another place. His performance must but be watched with envy and concern by the National Coal Board.

The contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East so excited me that I made a momentary intervention, which I hope he will not think in bad taste. I must tell my right hon. Friend that a year ago it was my privilege, in undertaking the same task that I now perform, to offer a message of personal congratulation, though from the Treasury Bench, on his speech on that occasion. That message was genuine. I hope that it will not lead to complications for him, at any rate, if I repeat my good wishes and congratulations. His speech elevated the level of debate in the Chamber and it will be remembered long after this day.

That said, I must say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East that I felt as though he had taken me by the elbow and propelled me to one of those better eating houses in the area of St. James. As I sat down I was passed the menu, and with the delicateness of those circumstances I found that it was rich in suggestion but devoid of prices.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Why did my right hon. Friend not go a la carte?

Mr. Biffen: I do not do that when I am a guest of my right hon. Friend. Confronted by a menu which was the pinnacle of social discretion, I had this fascinating vacuity where in grubbier minds details should have been evident. When it came to the wine, I needed no memory. The bouquet rushed to meet me; it was vintage 1970-74. I say to my right hon. Friend——

Mr. Rogers: When will the right hon. Gentleman address himself to unemployment?

Mr. Biffen: This is a friendly discourse. It is a good-natured reflection between friends, a characteristic that is unknown on the Opposition Benches. I say to my right hon. Friend that perhaps our next assignment will be at a Wimpy bar. However, I am certain that the areas he outlined for policy debate are the most legitimate of all and that they will persist throughout the Session.

The three main elements that I shall touch upon in the substance of my speech concern procedure, which is customary for the Leader of the House in replying to this debate. It will include also certain aspects of the Queen's Speech and the legislative tone of it, which is the heart of the debate and, finally, the general economic background against which we shall be transacting our business and which comprised the majority of the speech of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore).

I shall take account of procedural points raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), and will be in touch with him in due course.

The point on which I should like to detain the House for a moment is that about Opposition time. During the debate on the Queen's Speech it has become clear that there is continuing unease among Liberal and SDP Members over the present Standing Order governing the allocation of Opposition days.

That Standing Order, approved by the House in 1982, lays down that the use of the 19 Opposition days provided for should be at the disposal of the Official Opposition. Hitherto, there had been informal consultation between the Official Opposition and the other Opposition parties through the usual channels about the use of Supply days but the House declined to formalise these practices as in an amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). The events of the past few days have made it clear that these informal arrangements give rise to dissatisfaction on the Liberal-SDP Bench.

I am anxious to see whether progress can be made on this matter. I must, however, stress that the procedures of the House are determined by a majority of the House itself. It cannot be otherwise, and whatever new arrangements might require, an amendment of Standing Orders can only be put into effect by the consent of the House. In the first instance, there is merit in seeing whether the existing conventions over Opposition days can be reconsidered in the light of recent complaints. I hope, therefore, that an attempt might be made through the usual channels. I believe that such an attempt will be made in good faith.

If, however, no progress could be made that way, then I realise at once that there would be the need to involve the Procedure Committee again to consider this matter.

The House will realise that the Procedure Committee has already decided to undertake a major review of public Bill procedure. This work was set in hand at the request of the House. The Committee has decided that its energies should be first directed to this work.

However, the Procedure Committee may well feel that it can accommodate the feelings that have been expressed in this debate. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) has argued that I should "ask the Select Committee to put the issue at the top of its agenda for this Session".—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 120.]

I am sure that the House could not properly consider this matter without a report from the Select Committee. Meanwhile the right hon. Gentleman knows that the Select Committee is instructed by the House, and any approaches on my part should take account of that.

At this point, I should mention that I have been in touch with my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton, (Sir P. Emery) the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure. I know that he cannot be in his place today: parliamentary duties require him to be abroad. I have, however, been able to discuss the issue tentatively with him over the telephone. I shall be discussing the matter with him again when he has returned to this country next week.

Should circumstances so necessitate, I believe that the House should have the option of empowering the Committee to set up a Sub-Committee for the particular purpose of studying the allocation of Opposition days.

That said, I am sure that the whole House would agree with me that if at all possible this is a problem to be resolved through the usual channels. To my mind, that would be the more expeditious way of proceeding, but if that fails, then it is on this kind of problem that the House would rightly wish to look to the Procedure Committee for advice.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) *rose*——

Mr. Biffen: I apologise to the House for having detained it, and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not press me. What I have just said is testimony of my good faith on this topic, and of the importance that I realise is attached to it on that Bench. I hope that it will be accepted as such.

The legislative load outlined in the Queen's Speech is broadly similar to last Session's load. Clearly, every Session leaves an imprint, and I have no doubt that the connoisseurs of multilateral political warfare will find that the legislation proposing the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan counties will reward them for all their interest. I have been reminded of that not merely by the Opposition.

Important though that legislation is, I remind the House of three other proposals contained in the Queen's Speech which deserve to be put in the balance and recorded in this debate. First, by any judgment, the Representation of the People Act is a major measure. It will significantly extend the franchise by providing for postal voting for holidaymakers and by extending the franchise to certain British citizens resident abroad. I am delighted that the legislation gives a handsome response to the recommendations of the Home Affairs departmental Select Committee for 1982-83. As Parliament is rooted in popular representation, I believe that there will be strong support for this measure, implying as it does a commitment to the ballot box.

Secondly, the Pensions Bill will be designed to improve the occupational pension rights of those who leave schemes before pensionable age. This is an increasing problem with greater labour mobility. This legislation is an advantageous social measure, and I am certain that the whole House will extend good will to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services in securing the passage of this measure.

The third item that I choose to demonstrate the utility of the Queen's Speech is the legislation that will be necessary for Hong Kong. That legislation is of great

significance—I doubt that that point will be challenged in any quarter of the House—not only because of what it portends for Hong Kong but because of what it means for us. The legislation deals with an area of growing political and economic importance and of great consideration to our overseas interests. The manner in which and the dignity with which we are adjusting our status in Hong Kong betokens greater possibilities for enhancing our future influence in not only that area but the wider Asian area that it serves. Since so much of our foreign policy in a post-imperial age derives from influence rather than the normal exercise of power, the legislation is in every sense a testimony to the negotiating skills of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

If I hear murmurs of discontent from the Opposition —I do not include the alliance Benches, but refer to the Labour Benches—I make this point: it is difficult for many hon. Members to believe that this country finds itself as well beyond its boundaries as within. Perhaps a country of this maritime tradition finds itself never so well far beyond its boundaries as within. That is a message to be taken to heart.

Mr. Shore: It is a great pity that the right hon. Gentleman is left to quarrel with himself and to imagine that he is engaging the Opposition in some great controversy. He is not. The only matter causing restlessness among the Opposition is his failure so far to address himself to the major issues of the economy, including our high and growing unemployment.

Mr. Biffen: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his reassurance. I shall not disappoint him on the question of debate on the economy. I realise that it is much easier for the right hon. Gentleman to stand at the Dispatch Box to agree with me than it is for him to agree with most of those behind him.

The three Bills, serving as they do social issues, issues of parliamentary democracy and a wider national interest, are characteristic of this wise Queen's Speech. But, of course, in response to the invitation of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney, I say at once that I refer to the economic background against which the politics of this Session will be conducted.

In the debate, we have heard frequent mention of unemployment. That is natural enough, with the jobless levels that we have experienced in recent years and that still persist. I shall, therefore, naturally comment upon that part of the debate. However, I shall make an initial reference to inflation. I appreciate that the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan), who is the erstwhile shadow spokesman for Scotland, seemed to be worried that I would not discuss the issue of unemployment. I say this to the right hon. Gentleman. Any consideration of the Queen's Speech must have reference to the points that I have already made, and any reference to the economy must also have reference to the level of inflation. If Opposition Members have become unbalanced in their consideration of the matter, they cannot see it in that wider perspective.

Therefore, I make an initial reference to inflation. The success of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in securing an inflation rate of 4·7 per cent. is central to the Government's economic strategy. It represents a valuable step forward in securing a sense of realism in economic affairs, pay claims and settlements and generally in industrial relations. Indeed, it is the relative stability that comes with lower inflation that has enabled us to live with such high unemployment without a greater disruption of our social structure.

Meanwhile, my right hon. Friend is determined to build upon the success of lower inflation. He does so with the prospects of increasing national output, a prudent balance between spending and taxation and a promising outlook for British overseas trade.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Did the right hon. Gentleman write this?

Mr. Biffen: Every word that I say is well considered and well measured. It may be trite—that I do not deny —but it is the obvious nature of it that Opposition Members cannot accept—*[Interruption.]* Even so, there remains the issue of unemployment.

Mr. Rogers: This speech is like the Chancellor's tie —awful.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's speech was heard in silence. I ask him to give the Leader of the House a fair hearing.

Mr. Biffen: Even so, there remains the issue of unemployment. The fact that it is also a major problem with our trading partners and rivals offers no consolation. The social and economic challenge remains daunting. However, the problem is trivialised by the rhetoric so freely used from Opposition Benches. I invite the House to share with me both an analysis and a prescription for the present employment situation. First I refer to the analysis —of how the unemployment toll has climbed upwards of 3 million. Some have suggested that unemployment has been the instrument of Government policy. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The very cheers from Opposition Benches that greet that remark show at what level Opposition Members are prepard to discuss such serious subjects.

There has been a crude slander that the Government created the present levels of workless to weaken trade unions. That argument is fantasy. Indeed, the reality, and not the fantasy, is that there are two major factors in our present unemployment situation. First, there is the demographic factor.

Mr. Straw: Ah.

Mr. Biffen: Is it denied that there is a demographic factor in unemployment?

Mr. Straw: Of course there are demographic factors in unemployment—though the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues always denied that when the Labour Government were in power.

Will the right hon. Gentleman explain why, while our inflation record is no better in relative terms than the records of our partners, our unemployment record is the worst of all the industrial nations? What is the answer to that?

Mr. Biffen: If the hon. Gentleman had had the pleasure of listening to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer making his autumn statement, he would know that my right hon. Friend rebutted that proposition in respect of our partners in the European Community. However, I am glad that we have elicited—not without difficulty — an acknowledgement of demographic

[Mr. Biffen]

factors. At least we have taken the debate a stage beyond the abuse that unemployment is a deliberate action of the Government and is designed to be a central part of their economic policy to harass working people.

The demographic factor of current relevance is the fact that the national work force has expanded by 400,000 since 1979, as those leaving schools and further education exceed those who are aging into retirement.

Firstly, there has been a massive transformation in the relationship between the work force and output. In 1983, the national output was almost identical to the figure for 1979, yet that identical output was being secured by a work force reduced by 1·7 million. Of course oil is a factor, but there has also been a productivity revolution, and the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth was generous enough to refer to that.

These are real considerations which help to explain a significant part of our current levels of unemployment. They also suggest that the new patterns of activity are more likely to come about if we abandon high-cost methods of production and follow the guides of competitive price and profit. That is the mainspring of the Government's policy.

Meanwhile, the Government have never denied the importance of public action and public funds in policies for employment. That has been particularly true in the ambitious training schemes we how have for young people. These are estimated to cost about £1,100 million in the current year.

Secondly, we have sought to change our fiscal structure to encourage the expansion of wealth-creating small businesses. We have also tried to shift the burden of corporate taxation so that it weighs less heavily on employment. The abolition of the national insurance surcharge was welcome and wise. It will do more to encourage, rather than penalise, employment.

Finally, we acknowledge that employment in Britain can best be secured within an open trading system and —no less important—with the political and economic alliances of the West. Indeed, it could hardly be otherwise for a nation exporting over 30 per cent. of its gross domestic product.

Yet we frequently hear cries from the Opposition Benches demanding protectionism and neutralism. Those cries can only harm our security, our trade and our employment. Therefore, I say to Labour Members that we will debate the issue of unemployment and the personal tragedies that it implies. But we will debate it by analysis and on policy, and not by generalised and extreme rhetoric.

The return of this country to greater employment will not be by some mechanical process. It cannot be gauged by some interlocking relationship with public spending or movements in inflation. As much as anything, it will be the product of social attitudes and business confidence.

It is a reality and not an abdication to assert that in these matters the authority of the Government is conditional and not absolute. That said, I have no doubt that the policies that I have outlined are well founded and will play their role in bringing about the return to work. In the debate on employment, as in so much else, the future belongs to us, and that is what this parliamentary Session will show.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 205, Noes 364.

Division No. 4] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart

Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Austin Mitchell.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Sir Frederic *(T'bay)*
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
McCusker, Harold
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, J.
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James

Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Donald Thompson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 35, at the end of the Question to add:

But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech offers no policies for reducing the level of unemployment.—*[Mr. Beith.]*

Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 35 (Calling of amendments at end of a debate), That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 200, Noes, 364.

Division No. 5] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*

Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth and
Mr. Michael Meadowcroft.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Sir Frederic *(T'bay)*
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
McCusker, Harold
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, J.
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Wm. *(Londonderry)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*

Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Ian Lang

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 352, Noes 202.

Division No.6] **[10.30 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Sir Frederic *(T'bay)*
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Richard
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony

Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Boscawen and
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken

Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robin Corbett and
Mr. Sean Hughes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

To be presented by Privy Councillors or Members of Her Majesty's Household.

Transport (Supplementary Grants)

10.43 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): I beg to move,

That the Local Government (Supplementary Grants for Transport Purposes Specified Descriptions) Order 1984, dated 18th October 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 22nd October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

This is a joint order by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. It is made under section 51 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. I shall concentrate my remarks tonight mainly on the points concerning England. The changes proposed for Wales are minimal, but my hon. Friend the Minister of State is here to deal with any questions on the Welsh aspects of the order.

The order will bring into effect the proposals announced by my right hon. Friend last month to confine transport supplementary grant to capital expenditure on roads. First, a few remarks about TSG. It has been in existence for 10 years. The aim of the system devised then was to encourage county councils and the Greater London council to pursue suitable transport policies for their areas and to compensate them for costs that were high in relation to their populations.

TSG was intended also to enable central Government to provide support for large, local capital transport schemes without the drawbacks of the system of specified grants which it replaced. In other words, it helped to smooth out the uneven expenditure patterns that most road building has. TSG also enabled support to be given to public transport at a time when no adequate means existed to bring expenditure on public transport subsidies within the rate support grant system.

However, in recent years the TSG system has not been able to reconcile the need to constrain local authority expenditure with some authorities' policies for extravagant public transport subsidies. Nor has this form of TSG met the vital need for a sustained level of investment in major roads.

In 1983-84, in the expenditure which the Secretary of State accepted for TSG, excluding London, 28 per cent. was for capital investment, but less than 10 per cent. of the grant was spent in this way. The tendency for councils to use TSG to support current spending rather than capital investment has been increasing. In 1980-81 councils used about 63 per cent. of TSG to support current spending. In 1984-85 they budget to use 71·6 per cent. while 25 councils propose to use 100 per cent. of their grant to support current spending and use none of it on capital investment.

The planned level of road construction has often not been achieved. For example, local capital spending on roads fell short of the Government's plans by almost £32 million in 1981-82 and by £11 million in 1982-83. This fall in spending has had most noticeable effects on the larger schemes needed to further the main objectives for local roads set out in the White Paper "Policy for Roads in England: 1983", Cmnd. 9059, the primary route network, bypasses and urban roads. The extra support from the taxpayer nationally represented by TSG should be used to benefit the population at large who produce the money and not only those who live in a single local authority's area.

Although the system was intended to favour authorities with high expenditure needs in relation to their resources, it has been criticised for producing an unfair distribution between different parts of the country. For example, in 1984-85 London and the metropolitan county councils received 62 per cent. of the grant available, when they account for only 38 per cent. of the country's population. The present system has also been criticised for being unpredictable in its outcome from year to year.

The possibilities of a change to the system have been around for a couple of years. TSG was increasingly difficult to reconcile with the developing system of expenditure targets and rate support grant penalties. The establishment of London Regional Transport earlier this year meant that it would not be possible to make a sensible settlement for London under the present system. It became apparent that the changes would be needed for 1985-86.

We consider that the first priority for TSG is to focus grants more closely on roads-capital expenditure, so we encourage investment in road building; to give a greater incentive than under the threshold system which has been extremely complicated, and to give some guarantee of continued support for schemes as well as to achieve a fairer distribution of the money available; and to give priority to our objectives for local roads as set out in the White Paper. We also have to try to stop the leakage of grant given for capital expenditure going into current expenditure as I described.

My right hon. Friend outlined his ideas formally to the local authority associations in May this year. In July we wrote consulting them on a capital-only TSG limited to expenditure on highways and traffic regulation. The proposed grant will be paid at a flat rate of about 50 per cent. We propose to consider to what extent the roads and routes affected would be of more than local importance. We propose also to take into account whether people living or working in an authority's area would be relieved of the effects of heavy through traffic. We also said that we would specify the schemes in the programme. Provided progress is satisfactorily maintained we shall continue to support them in future years.

Current expenditure on roads and public transport will continue to be supported through the RSG block grant. It already is to a large extent. We shall devise new formalae for grant-related expenditures for public transport revenue support and for road maintenance with the local authority associations.

We have been concerned that the shift from TSG to RSG should produce a grant distribution which will, as far as possible, reflect councils' spending needs for public transport and road maintenance. The proposals will not result in changes in the resources available to local authorities nor any reduction in the total amount of exchequer grant available to them.

Investment in facilities for local public transport such as bus stations, bus depots and rail electrification schemes will no longer under this order be eligible for TSG, but we will pay specific grants under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968, towards large worthwhile projects to provide new facilities. Some hon. Members may recall that we have used section 56 to support the Tyne and Wear metro. That is the type of scheme for which it should be used.

My right hon. Friend and I have discussed these proposals with elected representatives, and officials have discussed the financial implications at a number of meetings with the associations. Having considered the

[Mrs. Lynda Chalker]

outcome of the consultation, my right hon. Friend decided to seek the approval of Parliament to the necessary legislative changes.

The purpose of the order is to restrict payment of supplementary grant for transport in England to capital expenditure on highways and the regulation of traffic. In Wales, TSG will no longer be payable on parking. Financial support for parking will be provided from the RSG.

The Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 provides for different TSG systems in England and Wales. In 1981 the threshold system for Wales was ended and the eligibility for grant was restricted to capital expenditure on public transport, highways, the regulation of traffic, the provision of freight handling facilities and parking. This has been granted only for projects of high value. The order merely removes parking from eligibility. Thus, it makes no fundamental change to the arrangements already operating for Wales.

The legislative changes sought in the order will enable my right hon. Friend to operate the TSG system in the way that I have outlined. Article 4 confines TSG to expenditure in England in connection with highways and the regulation of traffic. Article 6 provides for the consequential amendments of section 6 of the Local Government Act 1974. It describes highways and the regulation of traffic as the transport matters qualifying for grant in England and changes the method of apportioning the grant from the threshold system.

The acceptance of expenditure for TSG has always been a matter for the Secretary of State's discretion. It is customary for him to say in circulars how he intends to use it in relation to authorities' transport programmes. The consultation paper and the circular issued on 22 October explained the criterion of more than local significance and how consideration would be given to such areas as the primary route network, urban roads and bypasses. These aspects can be dealt with under the discretion already available to my right hon. Friend. They do not, therefore, form part of the order.

The present TSG system has proved inadequate in a number of ways. It has not been able to prevent the use of the grant for extravagant public transport subsidies. It has not met the overriding need for investment in major road schemes. It has produced settlements which have been increasingly criticised as unfair and unpredictable.

The Government's proposals for changing the system which I have outlined will put an end to these inadequacies. They will enable Government support provided through TSG to be concentrated on roads which are of more than local significance. Day-to-day current expenditure on local roads or for general public transport subsidies are essentially local matters. Local authorities can best decide their own priorities for spending on these within the Government's targets for their overall expenditure and from the resources available to them, through the rates and RSG. Overall, local authorities will not be worse off as a result of these changes. Approval of this order will enable us to prepare a TSG settlement for 1985-86 on the new basis, which will enhance investment in new roads by local authorities. I commend the order to the House.

10.55 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): We should be clear about the background to the order. It is not only an important order but a mean little order. It was spawned in spite and nurtured in complete ignorance of the wishes and interests of the truly elected members of the local authorities, and it has been brought before the House with indecent haste. The motion to approve the order should have been moved by the Secretary of State, because its effects will be felt well beyond any of the extraordinarily unimaginative phrases that have been used by the Minister of State to give the impression that the measure was demanded by all and welcomed throughout the country.

Let us be clear about what is happening in this order. By changing from the transport supplementary grant to the rate support grant system, the Government have in effect said, "In future, we shall be singularly uninterested in the views of anyone in any particular locality about his transport system. We believe that we should have control from the centre exercised so that local authorities find it extremely difficult to set priorities that are acceptable to their electorate." Let us understand that in future parking, rail freight and public transport revenue support will go into the rate support grant system. The percentage of spending to be paid centrally will fall from 55 per cent. in 1984-85 to 50 per cent. from April next year.

How do the Government justify that spurious argument? They say that there are two reasons for the change. They say that local authorities have been underspending their allocation for capital road projects, and that they intend to change that. Their claim is based on an estimate for 1982-83 that only £330 million of the allocated £469 million was spent. Those figures were later discovered to be inaccurate. In fact, the council spent £442 million, which is only a 6 per cent. underspend. Central Government have already allowed trunk road underspending of 5 per cent. to be carried over. That 1 per cent. extra is so important that we have to carry through a major change.

The Select Committee on Transport expressed its surprise at the Government's inaccuracy. The Committee called for more encouragement to use capital money, but said:

"we would not wish to endorse such a change until we were satisfied that adequate provision could be made through Rate Support Grant for the support of current transport expenditures".

We are told by the Minister of State that the order is intended to curb extravagant public transport schemes. In future, large worthwhile projects — presumably those decided upon by the Secretary of State — will be supported and others will not. We are told that the Secretary of State consulted the local authorities, although the speed with which this statutory instrument has been brought forward makes one wonder how much consultation has taken place. On top of that, the Secretary of State has obviously ignored the views of the local authorities themselves because they understand only too well that in future they will find it virtually impossible to provide from the rate support grant system for the absolutely necessary items of expenditure outside road spending.

Let us return to spending on roads. Apart from the fact that the Government's fears of low expenditure on road capital are entirely false, one will not encourage road capital if the percentage support is cut even further to 50

per cent. instead of 55 per cent. this year. There has been a 70 per cent. cut since the Government took power. The Government have already undermined all sections of transport through TSG cuts. The TSG for England was £499·1 million at today's prices in 1979-80, but this year it is £400 million. For Wales the capital-only scheme first appeared in 1982-83. Then TSG on roads capital alone was £30 million. In the next two financial years it rose to £31 million. That is a 5·5 per cent. cut in the allocation for roads capital, despite implementing a new system.

However, the real damage of this nasty little change can be seen only too clearly when one considers the effect that it will have on public transport, particularly British Rail. The passenger transport executives of the metropolitan counties have expressed strong concern that moving their grant into RSG can cause only direct cuts. Manchester passenger transport executive says that British Rail cuts will cause 25 per cent. reductions in train services. West midlands has predicted serious consequences.

While the PTEs are directly affected, British Rail is hit because section 20 of the Transport Act 1968 gives local authorities a duty to subsidise non-profitable services of British Rail. Without TSG, virtually all the rail lines within the metropolitan counties, excluding the inter-city services, will close if the cash cannot be found from elsewhere. British Rail stands to lose £80 million, or 10 per cent. of all its subsidies.

However, the Government say that they intend to reconsider any capital projects, even if they are allowed and accepted, that have not been scheduled for commencement before 1 April 1985. Therefore, many plans for capital road building are under threat from the measures, and all to try to solve a capital road building problem.

The extent of the chaos of the Government's thinking on transport is demonstrated only too clearly by a little incident that we witnessed today. The Prime Minister, standing at the Dispatch Box earlier on, was exceedingly scathing about a headline in a certain evening newspaper — which will get no extra publicity from me. The headline is:

"90,000 golden handshake for Left-wingers sacked by LT"—

that is, London Transport. The Prime Minister said that she found that totally unacceptable. But what do we find when we study the article closely? It says:

"News of the pay-off with taxpayers' money will raise a storm of protest."

Notice that it is not local authority money, but taxpayers' money. What is the reason for that? It is made clear by the reporter. He states that the Left-wingers concerned

"were removed from office by Transport Secretary Nicholas Ridley almost before the ink was dry on the White Paper creating the new London Regional Transport Authority and separating it from GLC control."

The Secretary of State is responsible for that bizarre golden handshake. His deep contempt for locally elected people is such that he will not allow them to appoint to their own London Transport executive those who represent their views. The right hon. Gentleman is prepared to carry it so such lengths that he would rather that they went away with large golden handshakes than that they be allowed to play a part in deciding the future of London's transport system.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Did not the bandits at county hall appoint members of the Labour party to the London Transport executive only weeks before it was due to be abolished? Was not that an affront to common sense?

Mrs. Dunwoody: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand that, even with this Government, measures must be brought before the House before major changes can be introduced. The Secretary of State may ignore the views of the London electorate, but the Labour party is aware of its responsibility to the electorate at every level.

Let us be clear what this is all about. We are not talking about a more efficient system or saving money for the taxpayer. Roads are virtually the only part of the Department of Transport's work that has not been but by the Government since 1979. Motorway spending is up by £400 million—37·8 per cent. faster than prices. Even local authority road-related spending has risen 7 per cent. in real terms or £387 million in cash terms. Yet the Government's justification for this tatty little measure and for taking away local authorities' rights to spend money on revenue support is based on the claim of underspending on roads by local authorities.

At the same time, central funding for local bus, underground and ferry services has fallen by 37 per cent., which is the equivalent of £143 million being taken away from those services since April 1984. The Minister of State ought not to present us with wholly spurious arguments. She does not believe them and we do not believe them. We shall vote against the order to show the electorate the mean and petty attitude of the Government towards local transport.

11.7 pm

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): As one who has advocated for several years the change that we are discussing, I naturally welcome the order.

I should have thought that Opposition Members who represent Welsh constituencies would reflect on the excellent road building programme that has been started in many parts of Wales since the changes introduced by the Welsh Office. I have been to the Principality to see the excellent schemes underway there, particularly in Cardiff where there is a scheme to help with the new port facility and industrial development in the city. Much money that would otherwise not have been available has been spent in Wales.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Will the hon. Gentleman accept that the new schemes in Wales have been implemented at the expense of schemes that have been in the plans for years? Areas have been blighted because of uncertainty about whether schemes would go ahead and many towns and villages that needed bypasses have lost them. It has been an absolute mess and it needs to be sorted out.

Mr. Fry: The hon. Member is merely saying that more money should be spent on roads in Wales. I agree, but expenditure is a matter of priorities and we all wish that we had more money for our own constituencies.

Contrary to the impression given by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), whom I welcome to her new responsibilities, the Select Committee on Transport made it clear that it was sympathetic to the proposed changes. I am a member of the Select Committee, and I think that the hon. Lady's quotations from our report were selective and gave a wrong flavour to the report.

[Mr. Fry]

Surely the Opposition cannot accept that local authorities should be allowed to put in bids for TSG based on fictitious figures. They often put in amounts for road building and maintenance without having any intention of spending the money for that purpose. They wished to divert it to other purposes. Before hon. Members descend upon me with rods, they should recall that when there was a Labour Secretary of State for Transport, he complained bitterly about the activities of some Labour-controlled authorities, such as South Yorkshire, which pursued policies which were at variance with the bids that they put in. It is unacceptable for bids to be put in on a spurious basis, and it therefore makes sense that the suggested change should take place.

However, I wish to make two reservations. When the Select Committee made its report upon road maintenance, we were somewhat concerned about the amount of money being spent, particularly on urban local roads. It seemed to us that there was a danger that insufficient moneys would be forthcoming for the renewal and repair of those roads which in many towns were falling into a serious state. I want therefore to utter a word of caution. Enough money must be put into the rate support grant to ensure that there is no danger of continued deterioration.

Secondly, I feel that this measure may be the first of a number of measures which may affect local transport during this Parliament. My views on the matter are well known. My hon. Friend the Minister of State and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State must be aware of the charge that is likely to be made that the changes that they are trying to effect—the sum total of changes this year—are likely to mean that many local authorities will be forced to make difficult decisions, particularly about the level of revenue support. If the Government are determined that there shall be no deterioration in public transport, the support that will be offered to local authorities, once all the legislation has been passed, must be spelt out more clearly.

It is because I believe that the present measure cannot be considered purely on its own that I have those reservations. When we discuss legislation on buses, Opposition Members may be surprised by the way in which I shall vote; but we are not doing so now. We should give the Government the benefit of the doubt, and support the measure. If, later on, it appears that the measure has been used simply to make it more difficult for local authorities to support public transport, I may find myself casting my vote differently when we vote on some larger measure. I have not been afraid to do so in the past and I shall not be afraid to do so again.

I hope that the House will approve the order, but I also hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends have taken note of my words of caution.

11.12 pm

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): I apologise for not having been present when the Minister of State began her speech. I must say that I have grave doubts about the order. While on the whole I accept that it makes sense, when one changes the rate support grant to a block system, to do away with transport supplementary grant, the uncertainty about what is to happen will mean that local authorities will feel worried about what is in store for them.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) drew our attention to the problem of the passenger transport executives. They do not know what the situation will be in the west midlands or the north-east or on Merseyside. Will enough money be forthcoming to enable them to support British Rail under Section 20 of the 1968 Transport Act? We do not know. The measure has been introduced far too early. It should have been introduced after some definite statement from the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The Minister of State visited my constituency earlier this year. She must already know that doing away with transport supplementary grant will place us in considerable difficulty.

One of the criteria laid down in the order is whether expenditure is on a primary route network. We have no such network, as the Minister well knows. The second is whether the road is a major urban road of more than local significance. It could be argued that all capital highway expenditure on the island is of local significance only. The third is whether the expenditure is for a bypass which would relieve local communities of the effects of heavy lorries. I openly admit that that is not as great a problem in my constituency as elsewhere. We are therefore worried whether, after abolition of TSG, we shall be treated as fairly as when it was in operation.

During the past few years our transport policy plan has met with a fair response from the Government. We have had a good allocation, but can the Minister say in all sincerity that having done away with TSG she can guarantee that, under the block grant system, we shall do so well? I gravely doubt whether she can. Therefore, with reluctance, I cannot support the order. I say that although I supported the change in the grant system introduced by the former Secretary of State for the Environment. It was right to change the block grant system and it is only sensible to do away with TSG now and to put it in the block grant. However, the change is premature and the Government should have given us some guarantee before introducing the order. We and passenger transport executives have great difficulties accepting that we shall be as well served by the new system as by the old one.

11.16 pm

Sir Paul Hawkins (Norfolk, South-West): I greatly welcome the change because I lost a bypass around my home town. It badly needs that bypass but lost it because the county council spent the money on other things. This order is a move in the right direction for my constituency and other parts of Norfolk, if not for the Isle of Wight. Many other hon. Members lost grant to build bypasses and to carry out major improvements on major roads between the midlands and the north and the East Anglian ports. We badly need more trunk and county council roads and I am convinced that many schemes have been lost because county councils have used transport supplementary grant intended for bypasses around small market towns that are almost shattered by huge vehicles for other purposes. For that reason, I wholly support the order.

11.17 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I agreed with much of what the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) said, except towards the end of his speech when he said that he would support the order. I shall certainly not do that. Transport supplementary grant has been hijacked and bids for capital have not been spent on capital. Policies that have been bid for should be carried out. However, keeping

capital spending on its own and shoving revenue spending in with the rest of the block grant would be all right if we had a real democracy. Unfortunately, we do not. Local government has no chance of acting independently. It is constrained by holdback and the rest. It is shackled hand and foot by the Government. If that were not so I should have every confidence in revenue spending being left in with block grant as councils could then make their own choices about priorities. Under present conditions we shall have little revenue spending.

In regard to the railways, local authorities are likely not to take a strategic view of rail implications. The chances are that revenue spending under section 20 of the Transport Act 1968 will decline. The same will be true for passenger transport executives. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) made that point. It is likely that the type of integrated transport system which we have in the metropolitan councils will disappear because of the limitations and restrictions placed on local authorities.

British Rail will be worried about the order. According to my figures, section 20 grants amount to about 5 per cent. of its revenue income. That will decrease. It will have more difficulty in meeting the objectives which the Secretary of State set last year.

I am worried about the implications of the order for the maintenance of roads. If a council is pressed for cash, it will not resurface roads, but postpone the work for a year. Hon. Members must understand that that is what will happen. If restrictions on a local authority are not lifted, it will postpone the work for a further year. That will increase the dangerous state of the roads, and make it difficult for us to move goods. Most of our goods are moved by road. It will make life difficult for motorists and especially for motor cyclists.

What assurances can the Minister give the House about maintenance programmes for roads? Even if she can assure us, I shall vote against the order because it is wrong for the railways, because strategic decisions will not be taken in district areas and because there will not be an integrated transport policy in metropolitan areas. Can the Minister assure the House that road maintenance programmes will be maintained?

11.22 pm

Mr. Matthew Parris (Derbyshire, West): I also welcome the hon. Lady the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) to her new responsibilities. She launched into her first speech with the bland understatement now characteristic of her style. I look forward to a continuation of that moderation which is her hallmark.

If the Secretary of State for Social Services had come to the House this evening with a proposal that a social services supplementary grant should be set up and the Government should earmark moneys for social services and restrict local authorities to spending those funds, Opposition Members would, quite rightly, have said that it represented an infringement of local democracy and that the ideal for local government spending was to give local government an overall sum to spend as it determined.

There is an argument for abolishing transport supplementary grant altogether, but my hon. Friend the Minister has not gone as far as that. She simply seeks to restrict the area controlled by the Government to capital spending. Has the case for maintaining Government purchase over capital spending been well made? I believe that it has. In too many areas transport spending has been twisted into social policy, and funds allocated for transport purposes have been used to redistribute wealth.

I am not against the redistribution of wealth—both parties spend most of their time redistributing wealth in one way or another—but I do not believe that taking money away from people and giving them free or cheap bus tickets in return is a sensible way of redistributing wealth. For that reason, I do not believe that moneys allocated for transport purposes are being properly used when they are used simply to subsidise public transport.

I was specially encouraged by my hon. Friend the Minister's comments about section 56 grant. Not all capital spending on transport will be spending on public works. All kinds of useful investments can be made in our public transport system—in roads, in railways and in buses—which do not involve public works. We should remember that there is capital investment in public transport just as much as in roads and that in both cases it is not the same as subsidising fares.

For all those reasons, I believe that the proposed changes are sensible and I shall certainly support them.

11.26 pm

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Many local authorities are worried about passenger revenue support in view of the problems involved in the present system of grant-related expenditure assessment. For instance, there is the anomaly that the grant for museums and art galleries is based on the square footage of the area's central shopping facility. The transfer to the grant system of revenue support for public transport, a bigger and more important aspect of local government, therefore worries many authorities a great deal. A large number of authorities run systems beyond their own areas, providing services for neighbouring authorities which do not have undertakings of their own, while others rely on the National Bus Company and other undertakings.

I believe that the proposed system is ill thought out and has been too hastily introduced. If it has to go through, local authorities and others responsible for running public transport will need to be assured that the same level of revenue support will be available so that services can be maintained, especially in rural areas and other areas of difficulty. If the level of support is not maintained, the public transport system will be endangered throughout the country.

11.27 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I am surprised at the Opposition's strong resistance to these proposals. I thought that there was a consensus in the House on the need for more capital spending on roads—for environmental reasons, especially spending on bypasses for heavy lorries, for reasons of investment for industry and, above all, for employment reasons. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) disagreed with the figures produced by my hon. Friend the Minister, but I think that both sides agree that local authorities have underspent in terms of capital spending.

Areas such as my constituency in rural Lincolnshire have suffered from the emphasis that larger authorities, especially in south Yorkshire, have placed on what my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. Parris) described as using transport policy as a means of social

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

policy and thus misusing the transport supplementary grant. When I was a member of the GLC, the Conservative administration were thinking in terms of using the grant for the Jubilee line, capital investment in the east end, and so on, but the grant has been misused by the current GLC administration.

My area has suffered from the lack of capital investment. Although Lincolnshire has more miles of road per head of population than any other county, we still have severe environmental problems in the Trentside villages and with the A46. The village of Dunholme has waited 40 years for a bypass. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, although London has 38 per cent. of the population, it gets 62 per cent. of the grant. Rural areas such as the one that I represent will welcome this order, and for that reason I shall vote for it tonight.

11.30 pm

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): The problem with a measure such as this is that it comes in the context of proposals affecting local government. In rapid succession, there have been increasing penalties and restrictions on local government expenditure. The Government have had many objections to local government expenditure proposals in the past few months. There have been problems in the negotiations on the formula for grant related expenditure, and penalties have been applied there. The Government have become increasingly persistent in interfering with local government, which is an elected part of our constitution, and which has the right to a say in the determination of its own affairs.

For Wales, there is a modification of the transport-related grant. For England, there is a wholesale transfer from transport-related grant to rate support grant, leaving, for the determination next year and each succeeding year, only the highways and the regulation of transport operations in the local authority areas.

The amount of money involved nationally is relatively small, but at local level it is of increasing importance. There is not sufficient evidence—although I have read some of the Select Committee reports, and have gone into the matter carefully—to suggest that local authorities are misusing their bids for transport supplementary grant. There may be some cases of this, but there is no perfection, either here or in any part of local government. We have to deal with our responsibilities by making shrewd judgments. A local authority should be allowed some flexibility of judgment in the overall finances available to it.

In this order, the Government are being rather petulant. A local authority may decide, after making a bid, and succeeding in getting it, that there is a need in that period for some other priority — a practice that has been acceptable hitherto. Why the sudden discovery that it is wrong? Here is another instance of promises made in the 1979 and 1983 election manifestos of non-intervention going out of the window. The Government have become the biggest interferers that I have known since I entered political life. They are here making a dishonest prospectus for the country.

The issue of transport in London has to be related to the future of the GLC. All that the Government wanted to do from the outset was to get rid of the GLC. They knew that if they did that alone, they would be charged with political nepotism and so they decided to include the metropolitan counties in their abolition plans. They are interfering with the PTAs, and are forcing through this order.

It is not fair to either side of the House to have an order such as this, which is incomprehensible on first reading. The short explanatory note does not deal with the whole problem that we are facing. We shall have a vote tonight, yet hon. Members cannot honestly say that we have had an in-depth debate on matters of great importance to local authorities.

With approximately 20 Bills to come before the House this Session we are becoming so legislatively constipated that we shall not make much sense of the real affairs of Britain. I hope that the Government will understand that some people are saying that enough is enough and that, when elected, local authorities have a right to determine their own affairs without forever going cap in hand to a Secretary of State, and this Secretary of State in particular, because his only hallmark is his persistence to outdo his own Prime Minister.

11.35 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): In the short time available to me, I want to say that if the Department of Transport intends to take out of the hands of local authorities decisions about priorities, for heaven's sake let us make sensible decisions in each individual case rather than laying down grandiose rules.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State, whose attention I hope to attract for just two minutes, will know that for some time I have taken the view that, instead of building a trunk road from Fairmile to Exeter, that bypasses nothing, the same amount of money in the same constituency could be spent on bypassing Crediton. No danger points are removed by spending a huge amount of money on a trunk road diversion which does nothing except go through good land and ruin a number of businesses. On my hon. Friend's criteria the same money would be much better spent — if my hon. Friend is taking away the power to make decisions on those criteria from local authorities—on bypassing a town which, for a mile and a quarter, is utterly ruined by through traffic.

I know that it is difficult for the Minister to sort through her papers before she replies, but if she is taking away from local authorities the choice of priorities, she really must listen to her colleagues if decisions are to be made by Government instead. That is my message to her which I hope that she has time to hear.

11.37 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): It is a great pity that the Secretary of State cannot find the time to stay with us for an hour and a half. Perhaps he has nipped off to plug himself into his life support machine for a while.

Conservative Members seem to think that the order will somehow be good for transport in Britain. It has nothing to do with the efficient ordering of the transport system in Britain. We saw that in the London Regional Transport Bill. It is all to do with the further centralisation of Government powers and with assisting the roads lobby.

The Labour party's criticisms of the order can be put simply and straightforwardly. First, it undermines the original intention and purpose of the transport supplementary grant system. Secondly, it has been rushed through in undue haste.

The Minister said that the Secretary of State consulted local authorities. Yes, indeed he did. But the local authorities were not consulted until July. What was their reaction? Of course, we all know the answer. They were very much opposed.

Thirdly, there is the financial impact on the local authorities. Before the Secretary of State left to go elsewhere, he accused my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) of not doing her homework. The Minister might like to comment when she replies on some figures that I have. The allocation of transport supplementary grant under the new system looks as though it will take about £45 million away from the shire counties, which is a 30 per cent. reduction. There will be £29 million taken away from the metropolitan counties and £23·7 million taken away from the GLC—a 50 per cent. reduction overall. It is impossible to see how that is geared to assisting those authorities to meet their transport needs. Of course, the Minister is really saying —and will no doubt claim further—that overall the councils will not be worse off, because the aggregate Exchequer grant is determined independently of the total of TSG. Although the TSG will be reduced, the amount of RSG block grant will be correspondingly greater But we know just how easy it is for the Secretary of State to manipulate the block grant system.

Dr. Marek: There is possibly one good point about the changes being made, and that is that as capital will remain under the TSG the Government could put money in, and then increase construction thus reducing unemployment. However, that is sadly probably not the Government's intention.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): Wait and see.

Mr. Banks: There is too much of a wait-and-see attitude towards capital allocations for local authorities. One difficulty about underspends on capital outlays, which has been mentioned by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), lies in the one year basis of the programme. It is difficult for local authorities to know exactly what to do when dealing with a one-year programme that can be changed at will by Ministers. That is what is making local government so difficult to run. There is an increasing amount of intervention by central Government.

Perhaps the Minister will tell us how local authorities can be sure that they will get additional moneys through the block grant system. We should all be extremely grateful for that knowledge. We know how that block grant system has been, and is being, manipulated by Ministers. Indeed, it will continue to be manipulated by them. In effect, on the revenue side, the TSG system is being replaced by the block grant system. We do not believe that that will be good for transport, because the Government are manipulating the block grant system to suit their short and long-term political objectives.

Whilst on the subject of political objectives, I should add that I saw the story in *The Standard* tonight about the golden handshakes being given to the so-called Left-wingers sacked from the London Transport board. The article makes no mention of the fact that the Secretary of State then packed the London Regional Transport board with his own appointees who are no doubt totally non-political and not in any way interested in the right hon. Gentleman's policies.

Perhaps the Minister will tell us the difference between the salaries of Mr. John Telford Beasley, who has just been appointed as the new managing director of buses, and his predecessor. I notice that he is to receive a £41,000 salary. I also notice that he has many transport connections. He was an international business man with an American pharmaceutical company based in the Mediterranean before he joined London Transport. I do not quite see how that is relevant to running London Transport.

I also notice that Mr. Telford Beasley is coming up to Waterloo by train. He says that he will take a bus from Waterloo to Victoria. What a breadth of experience of LT he will gain from that trip. He says:

> "I don't see any point in having a limousine waiting for me every day at the station, when there is a very efficient bus service. I will use it every day, and I can get talking to the passengers and find out what they think of the service at first hand."

Mr. Telford Beasley will not have much chance of doing that while riding from Waterloo to Victoria—a distance that any other person would try to walk. No doubt we shall all be hearing a lot more of Mr. John Telford Beasley. How much bigger is his salary than his predecessor's? Is it true that he is a personal friend of Dr. Bright, the chairman of London Regional Transport and that that was why he was appointed? I believe that Dr. Bright was very knowledgeable about making Dad's Cookies before he was translated into the chairman of LRT. Where are all these people coming from? From where did they gain their knowledge and experience of the transport needs of London?

11.45 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) was rather scathing about the appointment of the new manager for London Transport bus services, Mr. John Telford Beasley. My hon. Friend referred to him as an American business man with no experience of London Transport. My hon. Friend was being a little unfair, because the Tory party has a weakness for American business men and appoints them to its nationalised industries with no great record of success. I hope that the new appointment will be more successful than that other well-known and well-paid American business man that they appointed to run the mining industry.

The hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West (Sir P. Hawkins) expressed concern about the number of bypasses that have been cancelled because of the subsidy to public transport in Norfolk. He sat down before we had a chance to intervene, but I should be delighted to give way to the hon. Gentleman if he could tell me one bypass that has been cancelled in his county because of the concentration by the Norfolk county council on public transport, bearing in mind that Norfolk is one of the much—heralded trial areas for the proposed bus legislation.

Sir Paul Hawkins: Bypasses were not built in Downham Market where I live. Fakenham was mentioned in the list of places which could have had money spent on it by the Ministry of Transport. I never mentioned anything about expenditure on public transport. I said that the money which should have been spent on capital grants was spent elsewhere, not necessarily on public transport.

Mr. Snape: That will not do. It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to say that money could have been spent

[Mr. Snape]

in a particular way, but did the county council pay for support for the Downham Market bypass — a place which I know, but not as well as the hon. Gentleman? Is there a reason why a much-needed bypass has not been built and why money is being spent on bus services? The hon. Gentleman fails to prove his case. If that is the reason for the way in which he casts his vote tonight, I hope that in future he will consider proposed legislation more carefully.

I hope that the Minister will concentrate on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). What on earth will happen to rail services protected by section 20 grants? The House deserves a reply. I hope that the hon. Lady will not accuse local authorities of scaremongering. I hope that she will accept that they are genuinely worried about their future. I hope that she will allay our anxieties.

I listened intently to the contributions by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) during the passage of the London Regional Transport Bill. I tried to like him a little more in Committee, but I had some difficulty doing so. I do not wish to be personal, but I liked him slightly less after hearing his contribution tonight, because he appears to understand less and less about public transport the more he speaks about it.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): That makes two of you.

Mr. Snape: I am delighted to welcome the Secretary of State to his place. What he says might be true, but I should not be so rude about him because he well knows the affection with which I hold his performance at the Dispatch Box. I notice that he sent his Minister of State to do the dirty work this evening. It will probably embarrass her if I say that she did the job better than he could have done it. Her role in the Department of Transport is to go round the country tapping her head significantly when asked about the Secretary of State's plans.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough talked about how essential expenditure on road works was. He talked about its value in terms of employment. He was right. Substantial employment is involved in road works. He obviously fails to understand what the Conservative party fails to understand — that there is a great deal of employment involved not only in the operation of public transport but in the production of public transport vehicles, such as the building of new buses.

I have to tell the hon. Lady, in her role of purveyor of excuses for the Secretary of State, that the bus industry is not exactly—to use a footballing phrase—over the moon about the Government's proposals——

Mrs. Chalker: That is a romantic phrase.

Mr. Snape: It is a bit late for romance for me. However, if the hon. Lady can tear herself away from the Adjournment debate, she never knows.

It is not good enough for the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle and others to ignore the fact that many private firms despair because of the Government's attitude towards the public transport industry. Does not the hon. Gentleman stop to consider that firms such as Leyland and Metro Cammell have enormous concern about the employment prejudiced by the barmy proposals of the Government? The public transport industry is surely not only about building roads.

The key to the legislation before us is that the Government are determined to prevent local authorities from making decisions about how money should be spent. They believe that Whitehall knows best. I understand that sort of attitude from the Secretary of State—he had a deprived upbringing. He went to a school where pupils were told from an early age that they knew best. The hon. Lady was not exactly a product of the state system either. The right hon. Gentleman believes that he is entitled to make decisions that will apply throughout the country. It is not only Labour members of local authorities who express concern about the Government's direction on transport policy. A great many members of the Tory party disagree with the legislation. Not too many of them are behind the right hon. Gentleman, which I understand, as many of the young Turks of the Conservative party found themselves, to their amazement, in the House in 1983. At least they can honestly claim that ignorance is bliss. The right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Lady have no such excuse.

I wish to refer——

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Where are the SDP members?

Mr. Snape: We must not expect the SDP members to be around at this time of night—it is far to late for them to be out and about. They have all caught the bus home, presuming that the buses still exist.

I refer to the newspaper report——

Mr. Christopher Chope (Southampton, Itchen): What is the beef?

Mr. Snape: Does the hon. Gentleman really want to provoke me into that sort of argument?

I refer to the report in *The Standard* today. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich said that she would not name the newspaper. I do not understand that. I make no bones about my attitude towards it—it is the worst newspaper in this country. It dropped below its usual depths today. Under the headline "Thank you Comrades!" it attempts to mislead — perhaps this was done inadvertently—many Londoners. It refers to "Left-wing Labour politicians" having been sacked from the London Transport Board and says that London ratepayers will be faced with a heavy bill.

The Prime Minister referred to the report and a later edition of the same dreadful newspaper reported that "Maggie"—of course, I would not refer to the Prime Minister in that way, I merely quote from *The Standard* —considered that the payments to the three who have been sacked were another reason to scrap the GLC. We all know that the Conservative party and Conservative Members hang on every word that the Prime Minister says—well, some of them do so with more enthusiasm than others. The blame for £90,000 being paid out in what are described as "golden handshakes" rests with the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. Leigh: No—with Ken Livingstone.

Mr. Snape: That shows how much attention the hon. Gentleman was paying to the debate that took place when the London Regional Transport Bill, as it then was, was being considered in Committee. He should be aware that

the Bill as drafted originally provided that compensation for such sackings or redundancies, call them what we will, should be met by the Greater London council.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman knows that he is wrong.

Mr. Snape: No, I am not wrong. If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, I shall gladly allow him to do so. Apparently he does not wish to intervene. The story about the sackings appears in *The Standard* in a slanted form because the right hon. Gentleman, with his customary incompetence—well, perhaps he was swayed by the persuasive powers of my hon. Friends and myself —accepted an Opposition amendment in Committee that made the Department of Transport responsible for agreeing the terms of compensation if any members of the then board were fired by the Secretary of State. That is what happened, and if the right hon. Gentleman wishes to disagree with my version of events, I shall gladly allow him to intervene.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman is not talking about the order, but he should get other matters straight. The original draft of the then Bill provided that the GLC, among others, could be asked to pay compensatory payments. The Government responded to the hon. Gentleman's amendment by removing that provision. That left the possibility — it was always there — that LRT should pay. The hon. Gentleman is exuberant tonight, but he should get these matters straight.

Mr. Snape: I have never been one to rub it in, and I shall not rub anything into the right hon. Gentleman's intervention. I think that he has conceded my argument, despite his initial indignation. He has accepted, in effect, that it is entirely his fault — this is the effect of his arbitrary decision to remove three members from the board — that taxpayers, and eventually London ratepayers, will have to foot the bill. As I understand the legislation, LRT will have to compensate the Department of Transport.

Mr. Ridley: Wrong again.

Mr. Snape: It is reported in *The Standard* that ultimately LRT will have to pay the compensation from its own funds, and that the amount will be decided by the Secretary of State for Transport. The right hon. Gentleman's incompetence is there for all to see.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West) *rose*——

Mr. Snape: No, I shall not give way. If the hon. Gentleman turned up more regularly to transport debates I might consider allowing him to intervene. The right hon. Gentleman has condemned himself from his own mouth. He has arranged for the compensation to be paid, and if it is another reason to scrap the GLC, as "Maggie" says, it is an even better reason to scrap the right hon. Gentleman, who is obviously unaware of the effects of his legislation, including the amendment that he accepted.

Once more we are seeing an attempt to undermine the principles of local government democracy. We are told that these decisions are rightly to be taken by central Government. What sort of Conservative party do we have these days when it believes that the bowler hats in Whitehall know the best way to spend local government funds?

I said earlier that I felt that some Conservative Members were motivated only by ignorance. The Government have no such excuse. They are motivated by malice. That is why we shall vote against the order.

12 midnight

Mrs. Chalker: With the leave of the House, I seek to reply to the debate.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) is his highly amusing self. Not much of what he said had the least bit to do with the order, but we have come to expect that from him. He said that he was over the moon, or something. I should rather say that he was still in orbit and has not yet been rescued by the new transport satellite, the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). I can only conclude that he had little to say about the order. I think that I know why, because I have, as is customary at this stage of the year, been around many of the roads annual consultative councils. I know that the shire and metropolitan county councils wish to get their bypasses and roads built. The TSG settlement will be roads capital only to assist them to do that, subject to the agreement of the House tonight and the agreement of another place.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) that the settlement will be based on the transport policies and programmes submitted by the county councils this summer. They decide their priorities, what they put forward in their programme and when they are ready to proceed. Provided that the programme meets with the criteria that we have laid down, which go far wider than the primary road network, they will receive the settlement. I assure the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) that if they are suitable for roads capital only TSG, within sensible limits his bypasses will get it just as much as those of anyone else.

Mr. Snape: Will get what?

Mrs. Chalker: Transport supplementary grant. I realise that the hon. Gentleman does not understand the system and I was trying to help him.

The capital allocations will also provide for additional expenditure over and above that supported by grant. Despite the comments and questions of some hon. Members, I cannot anticipate the settlement that will be announced in December by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, but provided that the order is given the support of the House tonight we shall be able to proceed to a much more sensible and less variable TSG than has been possible in previous years.

Mr. Tony Banks: Much smaller as well.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman is not right, but I shall come to him in a few moments if I have the time.

A couple of hon. Members have said that the change has been rushed through. Although formal consultation began at the beginning of July, local authority associations have been aware of the likely changes for some time. Capital only TSG has been around for some two years, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport had a good discussion at the national advisory council meeting with local authority representatives in May this year.

[Mrs. Chalker]

As I said a few moments ago, in that discussion the shire and metropolitan county councils said that they wished to get on with their road building, and they want a sensible scheme.

I am well aware that the metropolitan county councils do not wish to lose the excessive revenue support that they have been spending on public transport, but this TSG designed to promote the proper provision of local roads by county councils must be brought forward in this way now if we are to avoid what would otherwise be an unreal settlement in the future.

I accept that the mechanics of the TSG system have been difficult to understand. That is why when the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich commented about the change in the grant rate she ignored the difficulty of the threshold system based on population which has often made it difficult for hon. Members to understand why their bypasses in a sparsely populated county did not receive grant in the same way as they saw bypasses in more heavily populated areas receiving TSG. Those mechanics are simplified considerably by the proposal in the order. This is not a move to curb spending. We are removing the distortions that exist in current spending by using grant for the taxpayers' share of the costs of roads—those roads with more than local benefit. The amount of transport supplementary grant will differ from the previous amount, but the RSG block grant will be larger than it otherwise would have been to take account of road maintenance and other responsibilities.

The hon. Members for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) mentioned parking and other schemes. Since the system in Wales changed, only capital schemes in excess of £5 million have attracted grant. There is, therefore, effectively no change in Wales because of the order.

A number of hon. Members commented on the support for public transport. I have been surprised by the volume of support from the Opposition for the present system and their dire warnings about the new system. That only confirms my view that the current form of TSG is seen by Labour authorities as a means of financing excessive public transport subsidies. Unlike the Opposition, I do not believe that excessive subsidies mean healthy public transport or that they should be underwritten by the taxpayer. The discipline of financing public transport subsidies on an equal footing with other claims on the general resources available to councils will be beneficial to them. The councils may compare the value of the money provided by subsidies with the other means of keeping fares down, such as improvements in efficiency, competitive tendering to the private sector and the like. The Government are no longer prepared to support excessive subsidy for local public transport from central funds. The Government can no longer justify the payment of special central government grant to what are essentially local trading services.

I was asked about revenue for buses and rail services. In removing revenue support from TSG, we are not cutting the resources available to local authorities, as the Opposition have been suggesting. We shall maintain in real terms the provision for local authority current expenditure on transport at the planned 1984-85 level. This provides a sensible level of revenue support for bus services, which we shall continue to support through block grant. We shall be introducing a new GRE formula to reflect the need of authorities to spend on bus subsidies.

We already have a separate GRE indicator for revenue subsidies for local rail services in the passenger transport executive areas. Councils will be able to decide whether to maintain that support for local services within the resources available to them. It is up to them to decide their priorities in the provision of local services. The TSG will not be paid for them, but they will be receiving block grant. *[Interruption.]* As is to be expected, the Opposition are making a lot of noise in this debate.

An examination of what has happened in recent years — shire counties had just 38 per cent. of the grant available with more than 61 per cent. of the population while London and the metropolitan counties had 62 per cent. of the grant—shows why there has been so much disquiet about TSG and why demand has arisen for a more equitable system. We shall ensure that road maintenance will not suffer. The provision will continue to be steadily increased in real terms, and RSG will reflect that in full, according to the GRE formula contained in RSG for it.

I was also asked about why the changes are coming forward now. They would have come forward even if the abolition of the metropolitan counties and the Greater London council had not been envisaged. They facilitate the payment of the transport supplementary grant to metropolitan districts and London boroughs, as set out in the consultation papers. The metropolitan districts and the London boroughs will get the TSG. They will also receive the block grant for the financing costs of the capital. With the support from RSG and TSG, they will be able to continue contracts inherited and carry out necessary programmes. If anything is different, the proposed changes mean a fairer deal for the metropolitan areas over the abolition period with regard to their road programmes.

I promised to return to the matter raised by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight. I understand it, having toured round the island on a delightful weekend in the summer, when I met him and discussed with his county councillors the problems that they face. He and his county council may rely on the assurance that we have given that we shall continue to support schemes to which we are already committed, for example the new Yar bridge. For the future, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I am well aware of the special circumstances of several of the roads on the island. The terms of the order are sufficiently widely drawn to allow us to take the circumstances particular to the island into account when drawing up TSG for the future.

The local authorities will still continue to put their transport policies and programmes to the Department. They will decide the priority of their road spending. They will decide the way in which they wish to order their different schemes. That is certainly in no way a central decision about their programmes. They will also be able, as the new system develops, to consider schemes such as the regeneration of certain areas, which will have a national benefit. They can put forward many ideas, which I am sure we shall be able to accept in future.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business).*

The House divided: Ayes 253, Noes 169.

Division No. 7] **[12.12 am**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Budgen, Nick
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Edwards, Rt Hon N. *(P'broke)*
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fenner, Mrs Peggy
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, E. *(B'y St Edm'ds)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
McCusker, Harold
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, J.
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex

Eastham, Ken
Ellis, Raymond
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
John, Brynmor
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Winnick, David
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Don Dixon and
Dr. Roger Thomas.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Local Government (Supplementary Grants for Transport Purposes Specified Descriptions) Order 1984, dated 18th October 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 22nd October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

Blind Persons (Benefits)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boscawen.]*

12.24 am

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): At the outset of this important debate, may I say how pleased I am that the Minister for Social Security is to reply. I have known him for some years and know that he shares some of the concern that is felt in all parts of the House about the arrangements for the disabled. Tonight we are discussing those who are disabled by blindness. I have some sympathy for the hon. Gentleman, as I believe that his heart would like to make appointments that the Chancellor will not permit him to keep.

I must make some comparisons. Comparisons are always odious, but I should make it clear that, when they compare what happens to people with other forms of disability, the blind are not trying to make divisions between themselves, paraplegics, the mentally handicapped or those who are handicapped by deafness. There is unity and solidarity among the disabled. Although the blind would like their needs to be given special consideration, they do not want that to be at the expense of other sections of the community. Those other sections of the community have been fortunate in regard to mobility and attendance allowances, and the blind are most grateful for that.

I am pleased to see that my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) is present. Everyone knows that, although all Governments have been able to contribute, no Back Bencher has made a greater contribution than did my right hon. Friend by introducing and getting onto the statute book the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, which started a series of measures providing care and attention. The House is most grateful to him.

I intend to conclude my speech earlier than usual, as the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) is present. As this is an all-party concern, I hope that he might catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before the Minister replies. Blind people miss out in two ways—first, because most benefits are not geared to help with extra costs. For example, invalidity benefit helps people who have lost their income because they cannot work. It is not designed to meet the extra price of being blind. Secondly, blind people do not qualify for important benefits which would help with extra costs. For example, they do not qualify in their own right for mobility or attendance allowances. Blindness does not qualify people for mobility allowance, which is based on physical ability to move and not on sensory difficulties which make it hard or unsafe to get about and which impose extra costs in assistance and fares. Indeed, many blind people are barred automatically from mobility allowance because they cannot claim it for the first time if they are over 65—and more than half of the 130,000 blind people in the United Kingdom are over 75 and most lost their sight as they grew older. Blindness does not therefore qualify people for attendance and other allowances. In that context, I hope that the Minister will cast his eye over the possibility of making some improvements.

Blind people do not find it easy to do their own decorating, to clean their own windows, to cut their own hedge, to make their own clothes, to mend a fuse or rewire

a plug or to shop around for the best value. Blind people find that their clothes get extra wear and tear from bumping into things, rubbing against walls, catching on projections, scorching, cigarette burns and tears. Their crockery and glass is more readily broken and chipped. They often need to pay for a companion and to take taxis when they travel. If one is blind, one often needs tape recorders and tapes to keep telephone numbers, recipes and notes, and to keep up with the printed word. One cannot get by with a ballpoint pen and a pad of paper. One needs a typewriter or a braille typewriting machine. A blind person uses the telephone more and at more expensive times. One needs extra space to store bulky braille books. Braille takes eight times the space of print.

Blind people receive special help, and the Minister will take that into consideration. Forty thousand blind people get supplementary benefit and an extra £1·25 a week. That was fixed in 1962, and I hope that it will be revised. Thirty thousand blind workers receive extra tax relief that amounts to only £2 a week. But 60,000 blind people receive neither. There is, quite rightly, an allowance for those who cannot walk, but there is no allowance for those who cannot see.

Last session an early-day motion sought to persuade the Government to accept International Labour Organisation convention 159, which affects all disabled people, including blind people. It was approved by the ILO, but the Government have still to ratify it.

Blind people face problems at work. I mentioned their difficulty of remaining in the community. For the past 30 years the general principle has been not to put the disabled into institutions, but to make them a living part of the community. That means working. Blind people are at a disadvantage compared with other disabled people regarding sheltered work shops. Because blind people are provided for in an earlier Act than other disabled people, they cannot return to a sheltered work shop after leaving it.

In a period of prosperity blind people leave sheltered work shops and find jobs in the community. When there is a recession, however, they find themselves out of work —at present more than two and a half times as many blind people are unemployed as non-disabled people— and are not permitted to return to sheltered work shops. An attempt should be made to provide such a facility for the blind to bring them into line with other disabled people.

We are a civilised society. A civilised society is judged by the way it treats the very young, the very old and those who are not fortunate enough to have all their faculties and to be able to face the physical and mental problems of our modern world. A civilised society should pay more attention to the fact that for about 25 years the blind have been missing out on provisions. Something should be done to bring provisions for them into line with others who unfortunately suffer from disablement.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): I understand that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) has the agreement of the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt) and the Minister for Social Security to intervene.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I am greatful to the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt) for his characteristic courtesy in allowing me to intervene in the debate. He made an eloquent case for the plight of the blind. I shall confine my contribution to some questions which may enable us to judge more clearly the present position of the blind.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security was good enough to reply to a written question today in which I asked what the present day value was of the original blindness allowance set in 1948 at 15s, or 75p, a week. My hon. Friend replied that its value today would be £7.06. How does he reconcile that with Lord Glenarthur's reply on 21 March this year in another place that

"If the extra allowance of 1948 had been increased in line with the movement in the retail price index it would have been £8.21 in November 1983."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 21 March 1984; Vol. 449, c. 1359.]

I appreciate that the Government have made great strides in reducing inflation, but the disparity still seems rather odd. My hon. Friend may say that his answer allowed for the deduction of the housing cost component. If so, perhaps he will assist in restoring comparability as between the two answers.

The hon. Member for Brent, South gave a detailed catalogue of the extra costs incurred by the blind. I believe that the £1.25 currently paid barely meets the cost of maintaining a guide dog. The payment is thus in urgent need of review, especially as it has come nowhere near keeping pace with inflation. Although we applaud the increase in tax allowance given to the blind by the Government some time ago, does not my hon. Friend feel in retrospect that we might have done better to use that money to increase the allowances of the less well off rather than to help the small and relatively more affluent percentage of blind people in a position to pay tax?

I hope that my hon. Friend will also explain one or two anomalies relating to supplementary benefit. It seems that the non-householder addition will make single non-householders better off than single householders. The ordinary rate for single householders is £28.05 per week whereas single non-householders receive £31.15 per week when the supplementary benefit and the blindness addition are added together. Similarly, the long-term rate for single householders is £35.35 per week whereas for single non-householders it is £38.45. That appears to discriminate against the non-householder when it seems clear that the needs of the householder are likely to be greater.

In conclusion, I draw attention to my early-day motion 36 and hope that my hon. Friend the Minister has had the opportunity to study it.

12.38 am

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): This debate is of considerable interest to many thousands of people outside the House, some hundreds of whom lobbied Members on the subject earlier today.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on raising the subject and on the serious and responsible way in which they have put the case, which was very much in line with the impressive way in which the arguments were put to me this afternoon by representatives of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the National League of the Blind and Disabled and the National Federation of the Blind of the United Kingdom in connection with their lobby. It was put to me fairly firmly this afternoon by one of the people who was in the delegation that what was wanted was not expressions of sympathy but action. I understand that.

[Mr. Tony Newton]

I must make it clear that I cannot tell hon. Members tonight what they want to hear. However, I am sure that there is nothing between us in recognising the problems that blind people face, in our sympathy—I use the word advisedly—with their difficulties, and in our concern to secure that their needs are reflected in the formation of social security policy.

The existing major provisions in supplementary benefit and tax have already been referred to. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West is right in his assumption about the difference between the figure that I gave him in a recent answer about the real value of supplementary benefit addition compared with 1948 and the answer given earlier in the year in another place. It is because, as in all our answers on supplementary benefit rates, of which the blindness addition is one, we use the same price index as that used for uprating supplementary benefit, that is the retail price index less the housing component of that index. The comparable figure to the answer in the other place, had the recent answer been on that basis, would have been of the order of £8·50.

I hope that I made it clear in the answer that I was answering on the basis that I did. That seems sensible, given that for supplementary benefit claimants housing benefit costs are met separately, and that is as true for blind claimants for supplementary benefit as it is for any other. Therefore, it is sensible to use this index convention in talking about supplementary benefit rates or additions. I should not want to mislead my hon. Friend.

There has been reference to the supplementary benefit blind addition and to the tax allowance, which, as my hon. Friend said, has been increased by the Government to £360. However, it may be sensible if I set out in a little more detail some of the other existing provisions, because they amount to somewhat more than is recognised, and it is important that the possible entitlement of blind people should be understood. We have been taking various steps to try to ensure that it is more widely understood.

In addition to the supplementary benefit blind addition of £1·25, as my hon. Friend recognised, single householders aged 18 or over and those aged 16 to 17 who have a dependent child are entitled to a further addition to that benefit to bring the scale rate up to the higher level of a householder. That will be worth, from 26 November, £5·60 additional to those in receipt of the ordinary rate of supplementary benefit and £7·15 extra a week for those on the long-term rate, which includes pensioners. My hon. Friend seems to have misunderstood the position as between householders and non-householders. He will have gathered from what I have just said that the benefit of non-householders is brought up to that for householders in these circumstances.

Equally, where householders are in receipt of both supplementary benefit and housing benefit, where there is a dependant in the household—this is another advantage of the present system for the blind — no assumed contribution towards housing cost is deducted from the claimants' housing or supplementary benefit entitlement. In the case of housing benefit entitlement, where the claimant is in receipt of housing benefit only, the needs allowance is increased by £4·95 a week where the claimant or his partner is blind, and by £7·30 a week if both are blind. That does not mean an equivalent amount of benefit, because that will depend on various other circumstances, including the rent and rates paid, but it brings an additional advantage to blind people. The claimant's benefit is not reduced to take account of an assumed contribution towards housing costs from any non-dependent member of the household.

In the context of the debate, it is perhaps ironic that the provisions mean that, far from being ignored in the present system, blind people are, I think that I am right in saying, the only group of people who command special treatment of this kind as a result of a specific disability. In making that point, I am conscious that it can be turned round to say that the special case for the treatment of blindness in that way has already been recognised. Before hon. Members jump in to make too much of that point, let me say that for the most part those provisions are an inheritance from a time when blindness was virtually the only disability to be recognised. For a long time now—I recognise that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) played an important part in this—the approach of successive Governments of both parties has been to seek to recognise and to try to meet the needs of disabled people as a whole.

The principal reason why the supplementary benefit addition has not been systematically uprated, despite the introduction of new benefits and a massive increase in social security spending on the long-term sick and disabled, is precisely because Governments have sought to concentrate resources on provisions that help disabled people across the board.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): We cannot argue the case for legislation in an Adjournment debate, but the Minister is well aware that the RNIB, the National League of Blind and Disabled and the National Federation of the Blind are concerned to see the introduction of a blindness allowance. Will he be making representations to the Chancellor about the strength of the case for such an allowance? At the same time, can he say anything about the importance of the claim on behalf of people who are both deaf and blind for some help with their mobility? He knows that the Deaf-Blind Helpers League is concerned on that matter. I hope that he will be able to say a brief word about its case.

Mr. Newton: Indeed, I was about to make the point, in the context of what I have just said, about the development of benefits in recent years alongside the long-standing national insurance benefit, sickness benefit, invalidity benefit — sickness benefit partly replaced by statutory sick pay — for those who are incapable of work. We have seen from the right hon. Gentleman's work, and more recently from changes that we have made, the development on non-contributory invalidity benefits, now turning into the severe disablement allowance in which the position of the blind is particularly recognised by automatically passporting them over the 80 per cent. test. There is a range of non-contributory invalidity benefits from which many blind people have benefited. The introduction of attendance allowance has been another major development, and there has been the introduction of mobility allowance.

All those benefits are available to blind people on the same basis as to everybody else. Those are not idle words. I accept that there have been—this is directly relevant to the right hon. Gentleman's point — a number of

difficulties about mobility allowance, particularly involving blind and deaf-blind people, and to some extent mentally handicapped people as well, which remain in a state of some uncertainty because of a case which is now going on appeal to the House of Lords. The right hon. Gentleman will understand that, because the matter is subject to appeal, there is little that I can add tonight except to say that we shall review the need to look at the guidance, and, indeed, if necessary, the regulations in the light of the outcome of that case. Clearly I cannot say more than that tonight.

On our latest information, some 13,600 people with visual impairment are in receipt of attendance allowance. It must be bringing them considerable assistance.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is probable that the vast majority of those are elderly blind people who might well receive attendance allowance in any case?

Mr. Newton: It is possible, although we cannot be sure, because we do not have sufficient analyses. However, I shall come to that point in a moment. As time is short, I simply want to emphasise that as a Government we have sought to build on the approach of developing benefits that spread across the range of disabled people and are directed primarily to the needs that arise from disability, rather than to classify people according to their disabilities.

To that end, we have commissioned the most substantial survey of disabled people and their needs to have been undertaken in this country for many years, with a view to giving us better information for future planning and policy making. It would, of course, be open to hon. Members to say that they wished to change the approach that has informed the development of disability benefits in recent years under Governments of both parties, but I hope that they will ask themselves a few questions before deciding that that is what they wish to do. For example, is such an approach really consistent with the more coherent system of benefits for disabled people which is, I think, our common aim, given that the effects of so many disabilities and disabling diseases vary so much from case to case? Is it established that the undoubted problems that blind people face can be so clearly distinguished from those caused by other disabilities that the case of a blindness allowance can be taken in isolation?

The hon. Member for Brent, South has always, to his great credit, taken a close interest in the problems of deaf people and he will be as well aware as I am of the case put forward by them and on their behalf in respect of the extra costs of their special problems. Indeed, that case is being advanced at the moment. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would wish any more than I do to arbitrate between the claims of the blind and the deaf, but I am sure that I will carry him with me in saying that the organisations representing the deaf feel that they too have a powerful case which should command our attention.

Given that three quarters of those who are blind are over 65 and that well over half are over 75—in other words, that blindness is predominantly a problem of old age—are hon. Members really sure that it would be right to single out blindness for unique provision alongside the many other disadvantages and disabilities of advancing years?

In asking those questions, I have deliberately refrained from referring to the question of cost, but clearly that too has to be faced. To extend the blindness allowance to all blind people at mobility allowance rates would cost about £125 million. Even more modest proposals, such as the maintenance of age restrictions for mobility allowance and their application to a blindness allowance, would probably leave us with a bill of about £40 million. Inescapably, those figures must be looked at alongside many other claims including an extension of invalid care allowance to married women, a reduction of the 80 per cent. disability test for the severe disablement allowance, the possible introduction of a partial incapacity benefit, and abolition of the mobility allowance age limit. They are all powerful claims. There are also demands for an improvement in services, such as the employment services to which the hon. Member for Brent, South referred, if resources are available.

I do not know, and I do not pretend to know, the answers to all the questions that I have put before the House. I have tried to approach the debate in a spirit of listening constructively to the arguments at a time when we are looking at much of our existing provision for social security and mounting a major survey of needs, including the information necessary for future planning.

I am sorry that I have been unable to say what hon. Members would like me to say, but they can be assured that in our work we shall be determined to ensure that we take account—as we should—of the case that has been made here tonight on behalf of blind people.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 14 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LOCHABER WATER POWER ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Read the Third time, and passed.

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL (UIG PIER, SKYE)

Mr. Secretary Younger presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to Highland Regional Council (Uig Pier, Skye); And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered upon Tuesday 20 November and to be printed. [Bill 9.]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Falkland Islands

1. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response has been made by Her Majesty's Government to the most recent United Nations resolution on the subject of the Falkland Islands.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Renton): We voted against this resolution. It is not mandatory. We are not prepared to enter into negotiations on sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, but we remain ready to re-build confidence with Argentina by means of a dialogue on practical ways of improving bilateral relations.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that the case of the British Government—and, indeed, of the British people—would be a good deal stronger if social and economic conditions in the islands were nearer the norms of 1984 than those of 1784? Is it not a fact that the principal proprietor and factor in the Falkland Islands is one company, whose profits go to absentee shareholders? Is it not also a fact that Lord Shackleton some years ago reported that the land should be made available to the Falkland Islanders? Why are the Government not pursuing that aim more vigorously?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman's references to the distinctions between 1784 and 1984 are rather obscure. There has been press speculation about the private contracts which the Falkland Islands Company entered into with individuals. Those contracts were all entered into freely, without coercion. There is no evidence that would lead us to suppose—and we have checked with the Civil Commissioner — that any degree of coercion was involved in the agreement of those contracts. We are satisfied that under the auspices of the Falkland Islands Development Corporation there will be a gradual approach —as Lord Shackleton recommended—to the question of land subdivision and redistribution. That will take time, but steps are being taken.

Sir Anthony Beaumont-Dark: Is my hon. Friend aware that I recently returned from a visit to the Falkland Islands? There is no doubt that the people there are 150 per cent. British and that for us to talk about sovereignty at present could mean only that distance and expense had weakened resolve and honour. Although we can talk to the Argentines about many things, including minerals and oil, does my hon. Friend agree that we cannot now or in years to come sell British people unless they wish to live under a different regime, and there is no doubt that the Falkland Islanders do not wish to do so?

Mr. Renton: I am aware that my hon. Friend and other hon. Members have recently visited the Falkland Islands, and I hope that they all had a most instructive time there. Much of what my hon. Friend said, I endorse. We believe that the Argentines will realise that sovereignty is not for negotiation and that, putting that aside, they will themselves search for means by which we can talk about how to improve relations between our two countries on a bilateral basis.

Mr. Heffer: I shall set aside the question whether it was right or wrong to go to war with Argentina—an action which I personally supported at that time. However, now that — as a result of the war — there is a democratically elected Government in Argentina, should we not seriously discuss the future of the Falkland Islands with that Government? Is the Minister aware that, with our finances, we should not pretend that we can sustain the islands for ever, when they are bound to become a bigger and bigger white elephant and supporting them will not serve any purpose for the future of this country?

Mr. Renton: Like the hon. Gentleman, we welcomed the restoration of democracy in Argentina. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister welcomed it in a message to President Alfonsin last December, and our ambassador to the United Nations made strong reference to it in his speech in the Falklands debate. Although the hon. Gentleman talks in those terms, has he thought about the rights of the Falkland Islanders to self-determination? In our wish to begin talking to Argentina about progress to more normal bilateral relations, it would be sensible for Argentina to realise that the transfer of sovereignty, which is what Argentina means by talking about sovereignty, is not on.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Does my hon. Friend appreciate that President Alfonsin was completely opposed to the invasion of the Falkland Islands and should, therefore, be supported on that account? Was it not wrong for one organ of Government—not the Foreign Office—actively to discourage Conservative Members of the European Parliament from meeting President Alfonsin on his recent visit to the European Parliament? Is that not completely contradictory to what the Conservative party stands for, and more like the behaviour of a squalid Socialist Council?

Mr. Renton: We believed that the European Parliament's invitation to President Alfonsin was inappropriate — [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I said "inappropriate", bearing in mind the fact that one member of the European Community—Britain—does not have diplomatic relations with Argentina and that Argentina has not yet agreed to a formal cessation of hostilities with Britain. In those circumstances, my use of the word "inappropriate" is perfectly fair and reasonable.

Mr. George Robertson: What is inappropriate about the European Parliament inviting the newly elected President of a republic to address it—a President who kicked out the junta who invaded the Falkland Islands—and allowing Conservative Members of the European Parliament, who have also been elected, to listen respectfully to someone who has a mandate? As someone who has just returned from Argentina, I assure the Minister that the newly elected Government have a genuine, deeply felt desire to achieve a settlement that will be in the interests of Britain, Argentina and, crucially, of the Falkland Islanders. Should we not expect from the Government a reasonable response to such a conciliatory feeling before it becomes impossible to sustain such conciliatory feelings in that country?

Mr. Renton: I welcome the hon. Gentleman back from his trip to Argentina, which I am sure he found useful. I must stress that on many occasions during the past 12 months we have sought opportunities for the sort of talks with Argentina that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. The formula that led to the Berne talks was arrived at after months of negotiations, and following an initial message from Britain. We did not break the formula that had been agreed for Berne; the Argentines broke it by their insistence on talking about sovereignty. We hope that, putting sovereignty on one side, we will be able to talk with the Argentines about a range of options that will lead to normal bilateral relations between our countries.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. In fairness to those hon. Members who have questions later on the Order Paper, I ask for briefer questions.

Ethiopia

4. **Mr. Home Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to pay an official visit to Ethiopia.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans at present to visit Ethiopia, but my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development hopes to go out later this month to look at relief operations.

Mr. Home Robertson: One hopes that this relief operation will be making headway. As the Foreign Secretary will eventually have to carry the can for the cuts in the real value of the foreign aid budget announced by the Chancellor earlier this week, is the Minister prepared to give the House a clear, categorical undertaking that the aid programme for Ethiopia and other famine-hit areas will be expanded in line with the clearly expressed demand of the nation?

Mr. Rifkind: It has already been made clear to the House that any recent decisions involving public expenditure will not affect humanitarian aid to Ethiopia.

Mr. Baldry: Would it not be better for my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to go to Brussels, rather than Ethiopia, and take a firm lead in the Council of Ministers to persuade the other nations of the Community that, at a time when our granaries are groaning with grain, it should cut through the budgetary red tape and ensure that sufficient supplies reach drought-affected Africa?

Mr. Rifkind: I am aware that my hon. Friend has returned from a trip to Ethiopia, during which he saw many horrors, and his views are listened to with great care and attention. The British Government, in the person of the Prime Minister, have already taken an initiative within the Community, and, thanks to that initiative, since October the Community has already agreed on £35 million-worth of food aid to go to that country.

Mr. Kirkwood: The monetary figures being bandied about as being the prospective cuts in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office budget for next year are similar to the figures that would provide the 600,000 to 750,000 tonnes of grain required for basic feeding over the next 12 months. Will the Minister bear that in mind when he, or his right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, visits Ethiopia?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman, and the House as a whole, will appreciate that such is the scale of the problem faced by Ethiopia that it is necessary to pursue an international response. Britain has shown a willingness to make substantial contributions, and we have taken the initiative in multilateral and international organisations. It is through international co-operation that the greatest impact can be made.

Mr. John Townend: Will my hon. Friend ask our right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, when he visits Ethiopia, to point out to that Government that if they spent on food the vast amounts of money that they spent on celebrating the Marxist revolution and buying arms from Russia fewer people would be starving? At a critical time such as this is it not appalling for the United Nations to be proposing to spend £15 million on building a conference centre in Ethiopia?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. A country that finds it impossible to provide basic food requirements for its population should think carefully before using its resources on what many would consider to be less essential matters.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Having assured the House that there will be no cut in the short-term food aid, will the Minister assure the House that there will be no cuts in long-term aid? He will recall that most people in the world said, after the appalling famine in Ethiopia in 1972-73, that it should never be allowed to happen again. Is it not true that unless we give such countries long-term aid during the next few years we shall face further crises? Is it not as important for us to give them long-term aid as it is for us to give them immediate emergency food aid?

Mr. Rifkind: I accept that the long-term problems of Ethiopia require more than just emergency food aid. The hon. Gentleman, who has just returned from that country,

will agree that the immediate problem on which the international community should concentrate is that of the many thousands who face imminent starvation unless there is an adequate international response.

Mr. Bowen Wells: Is it not a matter for congratulating the Government that they have provided emergency relief and food aid to Ethiopia, not just in the past few months, but over at least two years before that? Under the definition of continuing humanitarian aid to Ethiopia, will my hon. Friend be able to sustain development designed to offset the effects of drought in Ethiopia and other countries if the budget of the Foreign Office is not compensated for exchange rate changes and inflation rate rises overseas?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right when he says that British aid to Ethiopia began not just in the past two months. In the past two years no less than £13 million worth of food has been given directly by the United Kingdom to help overcome the problems of starvation in Ethiopia.

As for the longer term, I am sure that my hon. Friend will accept that it will be for my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development to look at the competing claims of Ethiopia and other countries for assistance via our general overseas aid policy.

Mr. Healey: Does the Minister agree, first, that the scale of the human tragedy in Ethiopia is such as to make ignoble and unworthy the sort of political point scoring into which he was tempted a moment ago, and, secondly, that the scale of the exi•ting tragedy in Ethiopia far dwarfs the amount of aid which is being given by Europe and the United States? The famine in other African countries, notably Sudan and Chad, which border Ethiopia, is fast approaching the same scale. Therefore very much more humanitarian aid is needed immediately. If similar disasters are to be avoided in future years, development aid must be vastly increased above the level that Her Majesty's Government have so far found fit to provide.

Mr. Rifkind: I acknowledge at once that when the right hon. Gentleman speaks of political point scoring he does so from a position of great experience.

On the wider issues that he raised, I think he will accept that long-term economic aid for Ethiopia or any other country takes account of considerations which go far beyond the relief of immediate suffering and potential starvation. I am sure he will accept that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development will be applying the usual developmental criteria in deciding how to use the available resources.

Mr. Healey *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No. I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman may ask only one supplementary question.

Turkey

5. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current relations between Her Majesty's Government and Turkey.

Mr. Renton: Turkey is an important and valued NATO ally of the United Kingdom. We welcome the progress towards the return to full democracy made since the elections last November, but look forward to further steps in this direction.

Mr. Parry: Does the Minister not think it ironic that the American Government are making such a fuss over the elections in Nicaragua when we see Turkey, as a member of NATO and of the Council of Europe, still under martial law, repressing human rights and imprisoning trade unionists and peace campaigners? Will the Minister make clear to our Government, to the Turkish Government and to the United States Government the British people's repugnance at such double standards?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman complains of the slow progress towards democracy in Turkey, but he must recognise that in the local elections this March more parties took part than in the national elections last November and that 33 out of Turkey's 67 provinces will have had martial law lifted by 19 November. I understand and share his concern about human rights and about the trial of the trade unionists to which he referred, but he might like to know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has had four discussions in the past 12 months with the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mr. Halefoglu, at two of which the question of human rights was raised.

Israel

6. **Mr. Temple-Morris** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Israel.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): I visited Israel from 28 to 30 October. I was able to have friendly and open discussions with senior Ministers in the new Israeli Government on international and bilateral issues. I explained to them our support for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon and for early progress towards a settlement of the Arab/Israel dispute. I also had a most useful meeting with Palestinian representatives.

Mr. Temple-Morris: My right hon. and learned Friend is to be congratulated on the way that he handled that visit. Does he agree that now is a very appropriate time for a new and major United States initiative to achieve peace in the middle east? Would not that initiative benefit from the fact that the Israeli response, for better or worse—and it is to be hoped for better—would be the response of a national coalition Government?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree that the Arab-Israel problem cannot and will not be solved simply by being neglected and that time is not on the side of those who argue that. There is a case for seeking once again to move forward the search for a peaceful conclusion of the differences there, and the completion of the American election provides a fresh opportunity for considering that matter actively. Whether the existence of a coalition Government makes it easier or more difficult to see progress is a matter about which I reserve judgment.

Mr. Johnston: Did the right hon. and learned Gentleman discuss with the Israeli Government the absolute necessity of halting Israeli settlements on the West Bank as a precondition for any initiative of the kind suggested by the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) and state that that point was being put strongly to the United States Government?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That was certainly one of the points to which I drew attention. I drew attention to the

need to have regard to both principles — respect for Israel's right to a secure existence and respect for the right of the Palestinians to self-determination—if there is to be progress towards a solution. I made it plain that the Israeli settlements were illegal, that their continued existence represented an obstacle to peace and that a freeze on that policy would increase confidence in Israeli intentions.

Mr. Latham: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his successful visit. Will he take this opportunity to put his weight behind a strengthening of UNIFIL and its redeployment in south Lebanon to help bring about a withdrawal of Israeli armed forces and at the same time to protect Israel's northern frontier and its communities in Galilee?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We have long favoured an expansion in the size and mandate of UNIFIL to facilitate the withdrawal of Israeli troops. Indeed, the idea was first put forward by this country in September last year.

Mr. Janner: In view of the improved relations between the United Kingdom and Israel fostered by the Foreign Secretary's visit, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman reaffirm the Government's opposition to the Arab boycott and reconsider the continued authentication of Arab boycott documents, which is so greatly resented by Israel and by those who believe in free trade among democratic countries?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I certainly renew our deploration of all attempts by third parties to restrict trade with Israel and thus of the boycott itself. As the hon. and learned Gentleman knows, just over a year ago we completed a review of the kind that he requests on Foreign and Commonwealth Office authentication. We concluded that it would not be right to change the present position. It is a standard legal procedure and does no more than confirm the validity of the signature. It is true that this causes continuing anxiety in Israel—I heard and took note of it —but I do not wish to encourage the belief that we intend to renew the review.

Mr. Walters: As the illegal Israeli settlements on the occupied West Bank are a major impediment to progress towards peace, what further steps does my right hon. and learned Friend intend to take, possibly with our European partners, to ensure that that major obstacle is removed?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We shall be considering the matter yet again in the European Community in the light of the re-election of President Reagan, but I do not wish to encourage the belief that we shall be launching a new initiative — [*Interruption.*] I appreciate hon. Members' amusement at that comment, but it is all too easy to generate the hope of some dramatic new breakthrough when what is really needed is sustained application by the European Community, in consultation with the United States, to try to get the parties to move forward along the lines that I have described. I shall certainly seek to promote progress in that direction.

Mr. Concannon: Having been involved in the Palestinian problem for nearly 40 years, since 1945, I thank the Foreign Secretary for his robust statement regarding the Palestinians and for meeting their representatives. Is there any chance of some action to follow those final words?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. In the interests of Israel as much as of the Palestinians the problem cannot be left to fester, as it is likely to get worse rather than better. It is thus important to urge on both sides the need to move towards recognising the principles that I have enunciated and to start the negotiation process. We shall do all that we sensibly can within the European Community and in concert with the United States, but the 40-year duration to which the right hon. Gentleman refers is one reason for approaching the matter with a cautious, though energetic, disposition.

Stockholm Disarmament Conference

7. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest session of the Stockholm disarmament conference.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Richard Luce): In the third session, which began on 11 September and ended on 12 October, the British Government, in close consultation with other Western delegations, continued their efforts to develop a detailed discussion on the practical confidence-building proposals tabled by the West at the outset of the conference. The neutral and non-aligned countries participated in this. To our disappointment the Eastern countries did not appear ready to discuss details either of these measures or of their own vague declaratory proposals. The conference resumed on 6 November.

Mr. Chapman: Will my hon. Friend confirm and stress that it was the United Kingdom Government who put forward specific and attainable proposals, such as the notification of the structure and deployment of military forces and the observation of military exercises, and that it was the Soviet Government who, sadly, not only failed to respond to those specific proposals but indulged in what can only be described as well-worn propagandist platitudes that have done nothing to build up confidence and trust between European nations?

Mr. Luce: I can confirm that it was the United Kingdom Government, in conjunction with our Western allies, who earlier this year put forward practical proposals designed to enhance the exchange of information about the structure and deployment of forces and of the mandatory observation of regular military activities. The purpose of those proposals is to build up trust and to try to reduce misunderstanding and the element of surprise that could arise as a result of potential aggression. So far, we have simply had declaratory measures from the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc and a total unwillingness to talk about those practical measures. We have the political will; the test is whether they have.

Mr. George Robertson: Does the Minister agree that the re-election of President Reagan at least allows a new opportunity urgently to reopen talks on arms reduction, but that the serious problem will now be to persuade the Soviet Union that the "evil empire" type of rhetoric has ended and that the President and his Administration mean business? Will he take every opportunity in Stockholm and elsewhere to convince our allies of their responsibility to show that we are all interested in reducing tension and arriving at the agreements that are so urgently necessary?

Mr. Luce: I must agree that the re-election of President Reagan gives a renewed opportunity for the Western world and the United States to pursue the question of arms control with the utmost vigour. I believe that the President of the United States wishes to do that and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall continue to work closely with the United States in supporting, for example, its proposals that there should be discussions of arms restraint in outer space and in urging the Soviet Union to be sensible enough to come back to the negotiating table, which must surely be in its interests.

Libya

8. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the Government's relations with Libya.

Mr. Luce: Four of the hostages detained by the Libyan authorities earlier this year are still being held. We continue to make vigorous representations through the Italian protecting power, and through other channels, to secure their early release. We look to the Libyan authorities to give a fair and open trial to the two who were recently charged with security offences. While British citizens are being held without justification we cannot begin to look at ways of dealing with other problems between us and the Libyan authorities.

Mr. MacKay: Will my hon. Friend go somewhat further and confirm to the House that we will not give in to Libyan blackmail by entertaining at any time a swap of the two British citizens who have been arrested with terrorists held in Britain? At the same time, will he confirm that those British citizens in Libya at the moment are being adequately represented?

Mr. Luce: I must endorse strongly what my hon. Friend has just said. There can be no blackmail whatever as a result of the four citizens who have been detained. If we, as a Government, were to follow the policy of handing over those who have been convicted in British courts of terrorist offences, that would undoubtedly greatly increase the danger to British subjects in many other parts of the world. We cannot conceivably contemplate that.

We are watching the interests of the four citizens with great concern and are taking action with regard to Mr. Russell and Mr. Anderson, against whom we believe that there are now charges, to clarify the nature of those charges, to ensure that they have adequate legal representation and to work hard to ensure that their trial is open, fair and is held as early as possible.

Mr. Ryman: Will the MInister confirm, or deny, that Libyan nationals are being trained in this country by the NCB in the use of computers which could easily be adapted for military purposes?

Mr. Luce: I cannot give a specific answer, but I shall look into the matter. We broke off diplomatic relations with Libya on 22 April 1984 in the light of the terrible incident in which WPC Fletcher was killed. We do not have any official relations with that country, but ordinary trade continues. There are still 4,000 British subjects in Libya and I hope that the House will take note of that.

Departmental Costs

9. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further action he is taking to control the total running costs of his Department.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) said on 27 June, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is continuously seeking to reduce costs. The process is continuing despite the increasing demands on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which were recognised by the Foreign Affairs Committee in its report on the FCO and ODA Supply Estimates. Measures which are being taken or planned to control running costs include, for example, travel and freight arrangements, office cleaning and secretarial services and computerisation of certain accounting processes in the ODA.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the Government's swift and humane action in Ethiopia will be unaffected by any expenditure review currently in process?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I give my hon. Friend the immediate assurance that in the course of the review of my programmes there will be no reduction whatever in the allocations made for humanitarian aid to poorer countries, including disaster or famine relief of the sort now being given to Ethiopia and elsewhere, and that any effect on the overall aid programme will be modest, and certainly not on the scale suggested in some newspapers. I am taking a very careful look at all the overseas activities apart from aid for which I am responsible, including the British Council, the external services of the BBC, military training and assistance, and diplomatic representation, and I will decide where adjustments can best be made in the national interest.

Dr. Owen: Does the Foreign Secretary accept that many of us believe that there is no case for any cut—even a modest one — in the aid budget? Given the problems of the Diplomatic Service with the movement of currencies, is it not reasonable that that should be met out of the Contingency Reserve? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give an assurance that if he makes savings he will cut back on some of the larger missions and not reduce the number of missions? It is a sign of success that over the past 20 years the Foreign Office has expanded the number of missions by 19 per cent. while having a 20 per cent. cut in the Diplomatic Service. Even single diplomat missions are better than withdrawing from any country.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman understands from his own experience that the programmes of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have to be managed within the framework of the Government's economic policy as a whole. He is right to draw attention to the scope for savings in the area that he has identified, but the fact that there has been a cut means that the scope for further progress in that direction may be limited. However, I assure him that no possible option will be excluded from my consideration.

Mr. Rippon: Is it not the height of folly that we spend billions of pounds on defence and yet appear to grudge every penny spent on foreign policy? In view of the

importance of the issues involved, will my right hon. and learned Friend produce a White Paper setting out the precise nature and purpose of any cuts that he has in mind?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My right hon. and learned Friend must understand that the balancing of all policies—whether on defence, Foreign and Commonwealth representation or on the substantial domestic programmes which are themselves having to face reductions—must be undertaken by arriving at the best balance of judgment. The House will be kept informed of my conclusions in the usual way.

Mr. Healey: Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm the estimate of his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Pym), that the figures announced on Monday by the Chancellor of the Exchequer imply a cut in real terms of between £30 million and £100 million in the expenditure for which the Foreign Secretary is responsible? How can he possibly justify any cut in the aid programme when recent events have proved that it is now desperately urgent to increase it by at least 50 per cent. so that it represents the same proportion of national wealth as under the previous Labour Government?

How can the right hon. and learned Gentleman justify any cut in other instruments of British foreign policy, already cut well beyond the bone in some cases, when the Government are increasing their expenditure on the European Community by £200 million more than planned earlier this year? Does he think that these priorities reflect a rational view of Britain's interests?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The reductions achieved in Britain's contributions as a result of the Fontainebleau negotiations are substantial and amount to about £2½ billion. The Labour Government's arrangements achieved not one penny saving. The right hon. Gentleman must recognise that all Governments have to arrive at a set of decisions which fit alongside each other in the allocation of their programmes. He must remember that when he performed the Chancellor's duties he announced reductions in the aid programme of £50 million in three successive years. That was a reduction on a much more substantial scale and it did not exclude an impact on the poorest people.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Spain and Portugal

55. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress in negotiations, on the accession of Spain and Portugal to the EEC.

Mr. Rifkind: Negotiations have been substantially completed in 10 of the 17 chapters in the Spanish accession negotiations, and 11 of the 17 chapters in the Portuguese negotiations. Negotiations continue on the outstanding issues, including such difficult problems as agriculture, fisheries and Spanish industrial tariffs, with the aim of resolving them in time for Spain and Portugal to enter the Community on 1 January 1986.

Mrs. Clwyd: Is not the date of accession rapidly receding once again? Will this not be seen as a sign of a lack of enthusiasm and good will on the part of other members of the European Community? Does the Minister agree that it is unfortunate that Portugal and Spain are linked in the accession negotiations, because the Portuguese negotiations could be concluded earlier than the Spanish negotiations?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Lady is right to attach importance to the date of 1 January 1986. We still believe that that date can be adhered to. There has been more progress in the Portuguese negotiations, but even they are not yet complete. It seems sensible therefore, since many of the issues are similar, for the negotiations to go hand in hand.

Mr. Body: As Spain has been building up the largest fishing fleet on the continent of Europe in preparation for entry into the Common Market, will my hon. Friend make plain this afternoon to what extent he can give an assurance to the fishermen of England—the fishermen of this country—that their livelihoods will not be endangered?

Mr. Rifkind: We attach enormous importance to the issues that affect the fisherman of the United Kingdom as a whole. Negotiations involve fisheries, which is one of the most difficult issues to resolve. We have made it clear that the common fisheries policy, which was agreed only after many years of difficult and delicate negotiation, cannot be disrupted as a result of Spanish accession. I believe that the Spanish authorities are realistic enough to realise that any fisheries agreement must take account of the existing interests of member states.

Mr. Johnston: What will the Community be able to do to help Portugal when it joins? It is the poorest country in Europe. Unless there is a significant increase in the Community budget to enable expenditure to take place in Portugal through the regional and social funds, will not all the talk about political good will and democratic stability be seen as empty rhetoric?

Mr. Rifkind: Portugal will be the poorest member of the enlarged Community and cannot be required to be a net contributor, however much the existing arrangements might otherwise point in that direction. Negotiations are still to take place on the own resources chapter and I am sure that all the circumstances will be taken into account.

Mr. Harris: I welcome what my hon. Friend says about the fishing industry and about the threat posed by Spain, but does he accept that there is considerable alarm and hostility over the possiblity that the whole question of fishing will now be pushed off until after Spain's accession? Does he agree that the uncertainty which that will cause will be incredibly damaging, not least to the fishermen of the south-west of England?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not believe that there is any danger of that. The main issues to be resolved during the current negotiations concern the length of the transitional period, transitional arrangements for access to waters and resources and fishery relations with third countries. All interested parties realise that the Community must reach a view in advance of Spain's accession. I am sure that that point will be put to the Spanish Government with great force.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Minister aware that the Opposition share the Government's concern that Spain and Portugal should be admitted to the Community on schedule? We are also concerned to ensure that the interests of the fishermen of the whole of the United Kingdom are protected. Is the

Minister aware that the Opposition share the widespread outrage of the British public at British criminals being able to hide in Spain outwith the jurisdiction of British law? Can the Minister confirm that a condition of Spain's accession will be an agreement on extradition? How far have we progressed towards that?

Mr. Rifkind: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's statement on behalf of the Opposition confirming that they, too, attach importance to Spanish and Portuguese membership of the Community.

Extradition matters do not fall within the negotiations for Spanish membership of the Community.

Joint Policy Commitments

57. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with European Economic Community Government's Foreign Ministers regarding joint policy commitments; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Community Foreign Ministers last met at the regular Foreign Affairs Council on 22 and 23 October. A special Foreign Affairs Council met yesterday to discuss the enlargement of the Community. As usual in the Council, discussions were aimed at reaching agreement on matters of Community policy.

Mr. Skinner: Did the Council discuss the disposal of the food mountains? When the right hon. and learned Gentleman next meets his counterparts, will he tell them that for the past decade or more people in this place—the so-called opinion-formers from the middle classes from both sides of the House, but especially from the Social Democratic and Liberal parties — have always told people that if only Britain was in the Common Market we could look after the starving millions in Africa and elsewhere? What happened to all those dreams? Where are the visionaries now? Are there not literally thousands of young children in Ethiopia, Sudan and elsewhere, with pot bellies and matchstick legs? Is not Latin America up to its neck in debt?

What happened to all those dreams for the Common Market? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman ask the Community to dispose of the food surpluses and feed those hungry mouths rather than send the food elsewhere?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No one should doubt the Government's concern to do everything possible to meet the problems of poverty throughout the world. The hon. Gentleman's perception of almost all the foundations of his question is fatally flawed in thousands of respects. The Community, through co-operation, has been able to generate a substantial increase in food production. It has been able to finance from scratch the Lomé programme of aid to African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, and intends to continue in that direction. It would be a great deal more helpful if the hon. Gentleman would begin to discard some of his offensive and ridiculous illusions.

Mr. Rowe: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that one of the most important joint policy commitments is that to a genuine common market in services? We are encouraged by what he said recently in Bonn about establishing that market. Can he tell us how much further he hopes to go in the near future?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance of the establishment of a genuine common market in services as well as in goods. We have been laying emphasis on the need to achieve that — for example, for insurance, road haulage and air transport services. We shall continue to press the case in all the Council's dealings with these matters—not least because it is only if we achieve a continental-wide market for services as well as for goods that the Community can make the contribution to reducing unemployment throughout the Community which we all believe it can make.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: How could the Foreign Secretary prevail upon himself on his recent visit to Germany to mislead the credulous and ignorant Germans by assuring them on what he knows well is not the case, namely that there is preponderant enthusiasm in Britain for membership of the EEC?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That is because I believe that the cause which the right hon. Gentleman has pursued with such tenacity over the years in the opposite direction is one which is receiving diminishing support.

Mr. Dykes: Will my right hon. and learned Friend pursue energetically with his colleagues the excellent proposals in the Fontainebleau document submitted by the Prime Minister dealing with vital matters of joint working, including majority voting on major decisions and greater political integration?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We attach importance to the Community operating its institutions in such a fashion as to achieve decisions expeditiously, and not have important policy changes of the sort referred to by my hon. Friend impeded by that cause. We do not support any changes in the structure of the treaty on voting procedures, and neither the Fontainebleau nor the Genscher-Colombo agreements envisage any change in that respect.

Mr. Robin Cook: May I return to the original question of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)? Does the Foreign Secretary not recognise that a public who are deeply moved by the plight of those caught in the Ethiopian famine view with bewilderment the fact that the EEC, which has the capacity to eliminate the famine, has done so little so late? Does he accept that the amount of grain so far released by the EEC is barely 1 per cent. of surplus stocks and less than one tenth of the amount which the EEC is currently converting into animal feedstuffs for Europe? Does he understand that it is offensive that the Government should announce this week increased expenditure on the storage of surplus grain brought forth by the common agricultural policy although it is cheaper to ship the surplus grain to Ethopia than to store it in Europe? What will he do to press his colleagues within Europe to respond with more generosity and more humanity before it is too late to respond?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman fails again to perceive the issue as a whole. It is necessary to overcome the Community's capacity to generate surplus food in many directions, at great cost, which cannot be disposed of in any way. That is one of the policies which the Government have been fighting and will continue to fight. It is a difficult one to sustain. There are many inside and outside the House who recognise that the Government have been taking the lead in pressing the Community to expand its aid programme to famine-ridden areas. Since

the beginning of October £35 million-worth of aid has been given in that way, substantially as a result of the lead given by the Government.

Common Foreign Policy

59. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards a common European Community foreign policy.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Progress is being made within the Community to establish an increasingly strong and effective common position by Community countries on matters where they can sensibly act together on external affairs.

Mr. Knox: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that greater co-operation on foreign policy within the Community remains a principal objective of Government policy?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I certainly will. The increasing use of Community procedures for political co-operation is something to which we attach importance. We believe that there are a number of areas in which we can more effectively act together and we have concerted our policy in that way.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that one area in which the Community was agreed was that of the Venice declaration? Does he regard it as rather sad that that declaration has not been pursued to a conclusion? Will he take this opportunity to welcome the decision of the Palestine Liberation Organisation to proceed to hold a Palestine national council on 22 November in Amman? Does he recognise that that is an initiative which should be responded to by the European Community partners?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The extent to which the Community was able in the Venice declaration to formulate a common position on the right approach to the Arab-Israel dispute was important. We shall consider at an early opportunity the possibility of making a further contribution to that process.

Mr. Jackson: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, while it is essential that the Community should be able to respond to disasters, it is essential also in disposing of the surpluses to which reference has been made that we should not undermine agricultural development in the Third world?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. One of the wider consequences of the production of surpluses within the Community at the expense of the taxpayer is the risk of doing real damage to countries which should be able to generate more successfully their own programmes for food production, and of doing long-term damage on a much wider scale.

Own Resources

60. **Mr. Gould** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Foreign Affairs Council has decided on a definite date for the introduction of the new system of increased own resources for EEC member states.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No, Sir.

Mr. Gould: Will the Foreign Secretary give an assurance that, long before the introduction of any increase in own resources, he will make a clear statement to the House that the preconditions he has set for the reform of the CAP and the budget have been met, and that the House will have a full opportunity to debate those issues?

Sir. Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman can be assured that, before any proposal for increased own resources is presented to the House, there will be opportunities for debating it. In considering that matter we shall continue to attach importance to effective implementation of the Fontainebleau-Brussels agreements on the need for budget discipline and continued progress in securing the necessary reforms of the common agricultural policy which were set in hand on 31 March.

Mr. Marlow: Will my right hon. and learned Friend set about scrubbing that aspect of the Fontainebleau agreement to do with the increase in own resources? The Government's justifications for an increase in own resources are the accession of Spain and Portugal, which has been deferred even further into the future, and the reduction in agricultural expenditure, which will not occur. That has been confirmed by the fact that the agricultural levy cannot even be applied properly in France. If my right hon. and learned Friend reads Old Muckraker in "Private Eye", he will discover that we are being done for an extra £100 million a year for selling Common Market surpluses of grain from our country.

Sir. Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend will not be in the least surprised to know that I cannot give him any such assurance. Provided the conditions to which we have repeatedly drawn attention are fulfilled—the House will have a opportunity to consider them—we shall, in due course, bring forward a proposal to increase own resources.

Mr. Loyden: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the system of food from own resources linked to a common agricultural policy generally is obscene? My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has said that it rings rather hollow for Conservative Members to talk about the problems of the Third world, which, incidentally, were not discovered in 1984, but which were the inheritance of imperialism and colonialism. It is the height of obsecenity that food should mount up in Europe while millions of people in Africa and other parts of the Third world are starving.

Sir. Geoffrey Howe: I cannot begin to share the hon. Gentleman's view that the common agricultural policy is obscene, or anything like it. The common agricultural policy was conceived to achieve a number of objectives, all of which are important — first, the production of ample food resources in Europe; secondly, the achievement of reasonable prices; and, thirdly, the achievement of both those aims in a fashion that protects the living standards of those who work in the agricultural community. All those objectives have been achieved, but, unfortunately, they have involved the production of surpluses in some commodities at high cost to the taxpayers. There is nothing unique about that in the common agricultural policy. Agricultural protection policies in, for example, the United States cost similar amounts. The task of controlling agricultural subsidies and

producing a sensible agricultural policy is bound to take time, and that is why we want to reform, but not destroy, the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Maclennan: Has the Foreign Secretary made plain to the French Government directly the wholly unacceptable nature of their refusal to implement the arrangements for the milk quota?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We have made it plain to all the Community Governments that implementation of the quota regime established as a result of decisions taken on 31 March is of fundamental importance. It is, in fact, crucial that that regime should be observed throughout the Community.

Mr. Budgen: What hope is there of general reform of the CAP when the first tentative steps towards reform through the super levy are being evaded or delayed by West Germany, France and Italy?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is plainly necessary and essential to press for the full implementation of the super levy, as agreed, as a foundation for that stage of the reform.

Mr. Robin Cook: Has the Foreign Secretary noted the statement by French officials that they agreed to this week's statement on budget discipline because it allowed sufficient flexibility to continue with the CAP? As France is patently making no effort to control its extravagant and growing agricultural surpluses, why should the House agree to increase own resources to continue to subsidise those surpluses?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Because the formulation on budgetary discipline which is coming close to agreement and endorsement is an undertaking that will bind the Council. It is an obligation that will also bind the Commission. It will serve to fulfil the need for effective implementation of the Fontainebleau conclusions.

Points of Order

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Due to your many and varied activities, you might not be aware that Dr. Mahmut Dikerdem and five of his colleagues have been released from prison. They were imprisoned because of activities in the Turkish Peace Association. I wanted to ask the Foreign Secretary about this matter on question No. 5. You did not allow any supplementary questions on the question about Turkey. On the next question, which I agree is equally important, you allowed five supplementary questions. I wondered whether we could have more supplementary questions on Turkey in future.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. We allow 20 minutes for EEC questions, and I am not complaining about that, but we allocate only 40 minutes for the rest of the world. When one recognises that certain matters such as South Africa and central America, all rather important issues, could not be raised today—if you look at the Order Paper you will see questions 10, 12 and so on—it seems to me that the amount of time allocated to foreign affairs is far from sufficient. Will you bear that in mind, and ask the Leader of the House whether this matter could be reviewed through the usual channels?

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is it connected with that matter?

Mr. Faulds: It is another matter, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall deal with this point of order first. I shall take them one at a time.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Having just chaired the Labour party conference, I have the deepest sympathy for you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am greatly obliged. In answer to the point of order, may I say that we made slow progress today on foreign affairs questions. I entirely accept the point made by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) about the shortage of time for foreign affairs questions, but that is not a matter for me. It is a matter for the usual channels, and not a point of order. I have to make a judgment every day on what the House considers to be the most important subjects. I judged today—I hope that I was not incorrect—that the Falklands, Ethiopia and the situation in the middle east were of paramount importance.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If this is within your province, which I think it is, at this early stage in the new Parliament will you discourage the seemingly growing practice whereby official Opposition spokesmen more and more frequently ask questions from the Back Benches as ordinary Members, thereby reducing the time for Back Benchers on both sides to put legitimate questions?

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that that is legitimate. Every Member must have the opportunity to put his question at Question Time. It is a different matter when calling a speaker in a debate.

Mr. David Crouch (Canterbury): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether I could draw to your attention the embarrassment and inconvenience caused to hon. Members when a question on the Order Paper is called but not fulfilled because the Member is not present. In my case, I particularly wanted to ask a question—I had formulated quite a clever supplementary question—but was not able to ask it. The point that I wish to put to you, Mr. Speaker, is that I hope that hon. Members who cannot be in their place to respond when their questions are called by you should let you know, and perhaps we could be advised that they will not be here.

Mr. Speaker: Order. A great many hon. Members—indeed, most hon. Members—let me know if they are unable to be here at Question Time. That is a courtesy that we should continue. Mr. Faulds.

Mr. Faulds: At last Sir, thank you. As to supplementaries, what should some of us do—*[Interruption.]* I do that all right. What should some of us do to ensure that our apparent invisibility can be even momentarily lifted?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am very sorry that I was unable to get the hon. Gentleman in today. *[Interruption.]* It is a serious matter. There is a very short time for foreign affairs questions, but it is not a matter for me. After a long recess, there are many questions that hon. Members wish to ask about countries that they may have visited. Today it would not have been possible to get every hon. Member in who wished to ask a supplementary question. I am very sorry about it.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do you not recall that it was not so long ago that we had 55 minutes for foreign affairs questions and that they took place once every three weeks rather than once every four weeks? Would it be possible for you to take up that matter in view of the complaints that have been made on both sides of the House, and to ask the usual channels to look at the matter once again?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The most effective course would be for the hon. Gentleman to do that himself. It is not a matter for the Chair.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 30 NOVEMBER

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Rob Hayward
Mr. Tony Speller
Sir Peter Mills

Opposition Day

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]—*considered.*

Schools and Further Education

Mr. Speaker: I should tell the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.38 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I beg to move,

That this House, believing that the future of the nation depends on developing the skills and abilities of all children and sharing the concern felt by parents and teachers about inadequate educational provision in many parts of the country, deplores the squeeze on educational spending which, as reports of Her Majesty's Inspectorate have warned, are already threatening standards in schools and colleges, and believes that investment in education ought to be improved and increased.

Last January the Secretary of State made a speech at Sheffield to the north of England education conference in which he set out a plan for raising standards. He modestly called the plan bold and ambitious, but realistic. One week ago the Secretary of State was complacently puffing the same plan in the Queen's Speech, but today, nearly one year after the Sheffield speech, the House is entitled to more than a complacent puff. It is entitled to an honest assessment of how much has beeen achieved.

As the Secretary of State knows, I welcomed the Sheffield speech because it accepted that comprehensive schools had standards and because it was a sign that at last the Government were beginning to concentrate on some of the real educational issues—the curriculum, examinations, teaching quality and the rest. However, we were always sceptical about the Secretary of State's ability to deliver. I expressed three anxieties at the time. The first concerned resources. Here was the Secretary of State talking about raising standards when his advisers, Her Majesty's Inspectors were warning him that the squeeze on resources was undermining the standards of provision in many areas.

Our second worry was that unemployment and social deprivation, a great deal of which has been caused by the Government, was making the job of teachers and schools far more difficult.

My third warning and worry was more personal. The Secretary of State's track record as a Minister is scarcely reassuring. Not even his most enthusiastic supporters can be confident about the prospects of success of a Minister who, in previous incarnations, brought off the incredible hat-trick of being one of the most fervent advocates of high-rise flats, being the man who carried out the disastrous reorganisation of the National Health Service and being responsible for introducing to British industry, at great public expense, Mr. Ian MacGregor.

I must observe, though with more sorrow than anger, that the Secretary of State's strategy is now running into the sands. There are two principal reasons for that. The first is the manner in which he has attempted to carry out his plans. The second is his failure to win additional resources to back the plans. As regards the Secretary of State's performance, I congratulate him on his decision in principle to introduce the 16-plus, but we want to see how it works out in practice. We also want the resources to go with it. Despite one or two good things, he has undermined the prospect of eventual success by his tendency to believe that he knows best, that he can change education by Elizabeth house diktat, by his abrasive handling of the educational partners, especially teachers, and because he has handed over a large part of education to the Manpower Services Commission.

I should like to give two examples of the Secretary of State's high-handed approach. In his Green Paper on parental involvement he rejected the advice of the educational community which favoured a balanced solution. Instead, the Secretary of State proposed that there should be a majority of parents on school governing bodies. Not surprisingly, his proposals have been opposed by virtually everyone in the education community, especially organisations that represent parents. Then we had the Secretary of State's extraordinary peace studies initiative. Despite having received only seven complaints —I know there were only seven, because I asked him— he alleged without a shred of evidence that teachers and local authorities were teaching in a biased way.

The Secretary of State has spent most of the year issuing a stream of circulars and papers from the dizzy heights of Elizabeth house, but he has made little effort to enter a real dialogue with those whom he seeks to influence—local authorities, educationists, teachers and parents. The Secretary of State simply fails to understand that one cannot bring about change in British education by diktat. There must be dialogue, consensus and partnership. The right hon. Gentleman's handling of the teachers has been especially crass. Everybody knows that the Secretary of State's plans need the support of teachers, yet the right hon. Gentleman has continually criticised the teachers in a generalised fashion. He intervened disastrously in this year's pay negotiations and has now tried to short-circuit the Burnham negotiations on conditions of service by threatening to legislate unless teachers accept his version of assessment.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman is not prepared to stick up for education. He encouraged the invasion by the Manpower Services Commission of the secondary school curriculum, under the guise of the technical and vocational education initiative. We have also seen the abject capitulation of the Secretary of State when he decided without consultation to hand over large parts of further education to the MSC. Only united resistance by local authorities and trade unions, and an intelligent volte-face by the new chairman, have created the opportunity for a constructive compromise. It is as yet no more than an opportunity, and no thanks are due to the Secretary of State even for that.

Now there is the appointment of Lord Young. Who is responsible for the education of the 14-to-18 age group —the Secretary of State, or Lord Young? Does the Secretary of State agree with Lord Young that the school leaving age should be lowered to 14? We are entitled to know. To sum up, the truth is that the right hon. Gentleman's performance in carrying out his plans has not lived up to his initial promise at Sheffield.

I know that the Secretary of State does not like hearing about cash. To make him feel good for a moment, I can assure him that the Labour party understands as well as he does that raising the level of educational achievement is not just a question of money. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad to hear that roar of approval from the Conservative Benches. Raising the level of educational achievement is also — as the latest report by Her

[Mr. Giles Radice]

Majesty's inspectors points out—about improving the match between the qualifications and experience of teachers and the jobs that they are called upon to do, raising the effectiveness of teachers' perceptions of the needs and potentials of pupils, varying teaching styles and approaches, and improving the ability to manage.

However, as the report also points out, even those processes are not cost-free. If we want the right teachers in the right places, if we want adequate provision of books and equipment and if we want schools and colleges that are decently maintained, we must provide the necessary resources. Our case against the Government is that they are failing to provide the money to finance the existing system adequately, let alone the improvements which the Secretary of State wants.

During the past year I have had the opportunity and good fortune to travel to the north, south, east and west of our country and visit over 150 schools and colleges. On the whole, I have found that the teachers are doing a good job, that the children and students are well taught and that much is being achieved. However, in many areas, shortages and deficiencies are becoming glaringly obvious. There are shortages of teachers in key subjects such as mathematics, physics, crafts and design, there are inadequate supplies of books and model equipment, and there are leaking roofs and peeling walls. There is also the growth of pay-as-you-learn. Parents are paying not just for extras but for the basics of education. That is wrong in principle, and unfair on the areas which are less prosperous.

If the Secretary of State believes that I am a subjective witness, he should consider the HMI reports, which are based on visits to nearly 1,500 schools, and on examples from all 97 local education authorities. The latest report shows a shortage of books in one fifth of lessons seen in primary schools; unsatisfactory provision of books and equipment in two fifths of local authorities; moderate or substantial parental contributions in three quarters of schools visited; and more reliance on parents than before. What should worry the Secretary of State especially is that in only 14 local education authorities was the provision regarded by the HMI as satisfactory in all respects.

The Secretary of State cannot say that the position is improving when he receives the sort of report that was published last week on educational provision in Norfolk. HMI, his advisers, warned him that,

> "The officers, advisers and teachers . . . are all operating in a system that not only has no slack in it, but which is already decidely over-stretched."

The report also spells out clearly that schools will be unable to meet national demands for improved standards without more funds. The Secretary of State should take that seriously. I am glad that, unlike some Conservative chairs, Mrs. Gillian Shephard welcomed the report and said:

> "It gives us strong evidence for our discussions with those who set the levels of Government grant."

That is a sensible attitude.

While on the subject of the HMI, I hope that the Secretary of State will take the opportunity this afternoon to reaffirm its independence and to dissociate himself from the ludicrous and biased inquiry about the role of the HMI conducted among Conservative chairmen—an inquiry in which his junior Minister was so unwisely and perhaps predictably involved. The Secretary of State should at least understand that shooting the messenger will do nothing to improve our children's education.

A reading of all the HMI reports—the Secretary of State prides himself on reading them all—shows that Norfolk is not an isolated example; in some areas, its spending is near the average for the shires. The Secretary of State should consider the lower spenders, such as Somerset, West Sussex and Hereford and Worcester. Not only the shires have problems. Dudley's director of education has issued a cry for help——

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): I take the hon. Gentleman's point about Norfolk because I represent a Norfolk constituency. However, does he agree that it did not help Norfolk education authority's case for improving resources in the education budget to maintain school buildings and equipment when the settlement to the teachers was above the going rate and above what had been agreed? That meant a reduction in resources for the areas to which the HMI report drew attention.

Mr. Radice: The settlement was not above the going rate; it was above the Secretary of State's assumption about pay. The Secretary of State got it wrong, and we cannot blame the teachers for that. Teachers' pay is still far below the level that it reached under the Labour Government.

The director of education in Dudley said that some schools had not been painted for nearly 20 years, and nearly 50 of his schools were inadequately cleaned. He further said:

> "The disgraceful state of the committee's schools is now undermining morale, lowering educational expectations and militating against a sound education for the borough's pupils."

There were many other examples as well.

I know that the Secretary of State's stock answer to all such criticism is that a lot of money is already being spent on education, and what is needed now is redeployment of resources. The Secretary of State's announcement on the abolition of minimum grant and the charging of tuition fees has shocked many parents and pupils. The announcement on tuition fees was the latest development of pay-as-you-learn. Parents of many thousands of students will be expected not only to meet in full the living costs of their sons and daughters but some of the costs of their education as well. Does the Secretary of State plan to introduce a scheme for charging parents full-cost fees as charged to overseas students, of £3,500 for art subject students and £7,000 for medical students? What are his future plans? I am sure that many constituents of Conservative Members will be anxious to hear what the Secretary of State has to say this afternoon.

No doubt the Secretary of State will also tell the House that the provision for education and science in 1985-86 is to be increased by just over 4 per cent. In real terms that represents a slight decrease in total spending. He will probably refer to the so-called planned increase of 6 per cent. in local authority spending on education. However, I hope that he will admit, because he knows it perfectly well, that the £10,259 million put aside for local authority spending on education is a peculiar figure.

The education expenditure steering group, which contains some of the Secretary of State's officials, confirmed that merely to maintain existing policies the Government would need to give local education authorities £10,734 million or £475 million more than the

amount that the Government are planning for 1985-86. I am sure that the Secretary of State will confirm those figures, because they have already been confirmed by his officials.

Before the Secretary of State leaps up and tells me that I have forgotten the unallocated margin of £600 million —he always tells me that—I assure him that I have not forgotten it, but I believe that education will not get much more than 50 per cent. of that unallocated margin. The truth is, and the Secretary of State knows it, that the majority of local education authorities are likely to be worse off and not better off as a consequence of the Government spending plans for 1985-86. His officials have already admitted that.

The next stage of the Secretary of State's argument is that the existing resources should be redeployed or better used. Those are the Secretary of State's polite phrases for saying that there should be cuts. However, let the voters be clear. The Secretary of State wants local authorities to make further cuts in school meals and milk, and that is said in his press release. Despite the High Court judgment in the Kent case, he also wants dinner ladies to take cuts in negotiated levels of wages and conditions.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): Why not?

Mr. Radice: Because they are extremely badly paid already.

Sir Kenneth Lewis: I know of local education authorities that have reorganised the employment of dinner ladies, have brought in part-time workers rather than full-time workers and have saved a lot of money. They are quite happy, and this can happen in other areas as well.

Mr. Radice: I am glad to take the hon. Gentleman's word for it that they are happy. But that is not my impression going round local authorities. I have met many dinner ladies who are extremely unhappy. Often they have no choice. Either they accept or they have no jobs. A pistol is being held to their heads. However, it remains true that since 1944 school meals have played an important part in our education service.

Then the Secretary of State turns to what he describes as the so-called extravagant authorities. That is his doublespeak for the authorities that try to live up to their statutory obligations and which, as the ILEA polls show, have the support of their voters for so doing. However, the right hon. Gentleman never explains how cuts in the budgets of these authorities——

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Haringey?

Mr. Radice: If the hon. Lady wishes to intervene, I shall give way to her when I have completed my sentence. The right hon. Gentleman never explains how cuts in the budgets of these authorities will help authorities such as Norfolk, which need to spend more. To take the example of the largest authority, if ILEA followed the advice of the Secretary of State and spent at its Government-set target level it would begin to attract the central Government money which it does not get now. The result would be not more central Government money for such counties as Norfolk but less. That is the reality, and I should like the Secretary of State to confirm it.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: How does the hon. Gentleman explain that Haringey's cost per unit is the second highest, yet it was roundly condemned for its standards by Her Majesty's inspectors?

Mr. Radice: In my view the chairman of the education committee was absolutely right. She said that she would take the HMI report very seriously, unlike some Conservative chairmen. We in the Labour party have never suggested that every aspect of education was perfect and that such problems as it had could always be solved by money. Money has to be properly used. However, we do not say that it is possible to improve the situation by cutting, which seems to be the policy of the Conservative party.

What makes matters even worse is that the Government's policies are so perverse that if such authorities as Norfolk and Dudley try to raise more resources through the rates, they immediately run into the Government's targets and penalties system. That is a classic "Catch 22" situation. Her Majesty's inspectors say that they think an authority ought to spend more. The Department of the Environment says that it cannot and that, if it does, it will lose money. The victims of this absurdity are the children who are the nation's future.

The question for the Secretary of State to answer is when and how he will live up to his obligations and provide the extra resources for the low-spending authorities. It is a question that he constantly ducks. He does not want to answer it. He never has so far.

R. H. Tawney wrote:

> "What a wise parent would desire for his own children a nation, in so far as it is wise, must desire for all children."

Every wise parent wants access to nursery education for three to four-year-olds. Every wise parent wants a high standard of decently resourced primary and secondary education. Every wise parent wants a decent education and training for 16 to 19-year-olds leading either to jobs or to well-resourced further education or into a far more open system of higher education.

I recognise that these are ambitious objectives. But if we are to survive and prosper as a country in the 21st century we shall need this kind of education provision. If the Secretary of State asks where the money is to come from, my initial reply is that such a question is downright impertinent coming from the main architect of the policies that squeezed our economy more severely than that of any other major industrial country in 1981, tore the heart out of British industry and, as the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) pointed out in Monday's *Guardian*, created 2 million extra unemployed.

My second reply is that, even on the Government's assumption of economic growth contained in the Green Paper on spending plans for the next 10 years, there is room for extra education expenditure. There is no doubt about that.

My third reply is that under a Labour Government our economy will grow faster and we shall be able to spend more on education. We cannot help doing better than this Government.

My final reply is that as a nation we cannot afford not to invest in education. Investing in our future.

4.6 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'believes that the future of this nation depends on developing the skills and abilities of all children; congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its policies for raising standards of education for all abilities by action on the curriculum, examinations and teaching quality; and welcomes Her Majesty's Government's policies for securing the most effective use of the substantial resources available for the benefit of the education service.'.

I shall try to answer the questions posed by the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) as I go through what I have to say. However, at the beginning of my remarks, because he attempted to flaunt his party's record and prospects, I must mildly take issue with some of his comments.

Looking at the record, one sees that the growth rate under the 1979 and so far under the 1984 Conservative Governments is substantially higher per annum than it was under the Labour Government of 1974-79, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer pointed out yesterday, and was not interrupted when he did so by any Opposition Member.

Mr. Radice *rose*——

Sir Keith Joseph: No. I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. My remarks are on the record, and the hon. Gentleman should refer to the report of yesterday's proceedings in *Hansard*.

When it comes to which party has cut public expenditure most fiercely, I am slightly ashamed to say that I have to give the palm to the last Labour Government. When they had to call in the International Monetary Fund, they succeeded in cutting public expenditure more fiercely than we, for the benefit of taxpayers and the public as a whole, have so far managed to do.

The hon. Member for Durham, North produced the piety that a Labour Government would preside over greater growth. On the records of Labour Governments it is highly unlikely that a future Labour Government would intend to spend more on education. But can the hon. Gentleman give the House a commitment that, if there is another Labour Government, he is authorised to say that more than he inherits will be spent on education?

Mr. Radice: Yes, I am authorised to say that. I also say that the country is only just beginning to recover from the tremendous onslaught of the policies associated with the Secretary of State on manufacturing output. We are only just recovering from the level of manufacturing output that there was in 1979. I invite the right hon. Gentleman to look at the facts. My right hon. Friend the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer made the same point, and he was not interrupted by the Chancellor. I remind the Secretary of State that the Labour Government spent £600 million more on education than on defence whereas the Conservatives are spending £3·5 billion more on defence than on education. It is a matter of priority.

Sir Keith Joseph: I fear that the hon. Gentleman has added to the credibility gap which I believe will prevent the Labour party from ever being re-elected. He has added to the infinite number of pledges given by the Labour party which failed to convince the voting public at the last election and will fail again.

It has proved no easy task for any Government, Labour or Conservative, to control public spending. It is as though the Government of the day were struggling like Laocoon with the snakes of public expenditure without ever quite vanquishing the commitments from the past. Nevertheless, the Labour party deserves some credit for facing the difficulties because it was the Labour Government who invented cash limits. The Opposition should take pride in having designed that instrument to try to limit the burdens on taxpayers and ratepayers.

The hon. Gentleman cannot escape by quoting the old relativities of defence and education spending because his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has warned the Labour party that for a Labour Government to move from nuclear to conventional emphasis would require at least as much, if not more, spending to secure the country's defence, which he properly accepts as a top priority. That being so, Labour spokesmen cannot expect to raid defence spending for easy transfer to social spending. They will have to grapple with the same problems as we face.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Keith Joseph: No, I am anxious to make progress. I rejoice that there is some common ground between the two sides. Both sides want improved standards and both sides accept that adequate resources are an essential ingredient. We may argue about what is adequate, but just as the hon. Member for Durham, North accepts that resources are not the only ingredient, so we accept that resources must be adequate.

Where the hon. Member for Durham, North went wrong was in criticising the resources available for education in 1985-86. The result of the Government announcements is that in 1985-86 education will be £600 million better off than in 1984-85 after allowing for the abolition of national insurance surcharge and the transfer of £64 million to the Manpower Services Commission.

Mr. Radice: That is not a real increase.

Sir Keith Joseph: Of course, it is not a real increase to the tune of 6 per cent. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has forecast 4½ per cent. inflation, so there is a real increase of 1½ per cent. In addition, however, one must take into account falling school rolls—a further significant reduction is expected compared with the current year — although the smaller population of students will probably rise by one quarter less than the fall in the school population. However one looks at the figures, there is a substantial improvement. Nevertheless, I accept that many authorities will find it hard to do all that they want to do even with that extra provision.

Mr. Radice: Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that the majority of local authorities will be better or worse off as a result of the spending plans announced on Monday?

Sir Keith Joseph: Comparing 1985-86 with 1984-85, most of them will be—[HON. MEMBERS: "Worse off."] No, I am seeking the right adjective. Most of them will be usefully—I cannot say "substantially" and I am cautious about saying "significantly"—better off. The overspenders, of course, will not be better off and the local situation

must depend to some extent on the extent to which the school population and the student population in the area meet the national average.

When we have finished arguing about these important minutiae, the fact remains that after years of constant criticism from the hon. Gentleman the pupil-teacher ratio is lower than ever before and expenditure per child is at record high levels. I accept that local education authorities have to grapple with all the problems of diseconomies of scale, but the House should take those two substantial criteria into account.

In replying to the various criticisms, I wish first to justify the Government's constant emphasis on the scope in many education authorities for redeployment of resources to higher priority education expenditure from lower priority education expenditure. For example, about 30 local education authorities, including a couple of Labour-controlled authorities, have achieved substantial savings on school meals by various means which I shall be happy to spell out for the record if anyone wishes to cross-examine me. I do not believe that those authorities are harder hearted than others. They are simply better custodians in the interests of the children of the very large amounts of public money made available to them.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): During his visits to schools, the right hon. Gentleman must have seen children eating just chips and gravy or chips and curry for their lunch. That certainly worries me. Does it not worry the Secretary of State?

Sir Keith Joseph: Children from households where there is poverty — households receiving family income supplement or supplementary benefit — are entitled to free school meals and those free meals are provided everywhere in England. If other children are provided by their parents with less than we would regard as desirable, or prefer to feed themselves in some particular way, we may well regret that, but I do not believe that there is a case for returning to the old universality.

I must also emphasise that there are other ways to save money for redeployment within education. I congratulate the local education world for its continuing effort to take out surplus places. It is not a popular task and it is laborious, but we are on the way to the target of 1 million surplus places being taken out of use set by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Carlisle) or his predecessor in office to be achieved by spring 1987. Nevertheless, there is scope for still futher redeployment.

The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) intervened effectively to point out that money provided for maintenance in the education allocation would have been adequate if it had been used regularly for that purpose over the previous decades — which it has not been in every case by any manner of means — to fulfil at least a respectable slice of maintenance. But, as my hon. Friend says, there is all too often a raid upon the maintenance provision — indeed, a raid upon book and equipment provision — when teachers manage to negotiate with their employers a larger pay increase than has been provided for them. Teachers have not yet come to terms with the fact that when they succeed in raising their pay increase it is at the expense of teacher numbers or other provisions in the local authority budgets.

Mr. Foster : How much of the Secretary of State's boast about the record pupil-teacher ratio is as a result of the so-called raids upon other aspects of the education budget and also the so-called overspending authorities? Is he not on the one hand boasting about a record pupil-teacher ratio and on the other criticising those authorities which have been giving him the results?

Sir Keith Joseph: Yes, there is an element of truth in that, but the hon. Gentleman and I may share the view that there is still room for redeployment of money if only more local authorities would copy the example of the economies achieved by some of their colleagues.

The hon. Member for Durham, North made an assertion about what would happen if ILEA managed to reduce its spending to such a level that it once again received grant from the taxpayer. I confirm that his analysis is correct.

The hon. Gentleman made much play of the shortages revealed by Her Majesty's inspectorate's annual report on the effects of local education authorities' expenditure policies. He is right to draw attention to them — they concern us all — but he is wrong to imply that those shortages are new and that matters have generally become worse under this Government. What a pity the previous Labour Government did not publish the HMI reports. They might have given the hon. Gentleman cause to look at the questions a little more deeply.

Let us be clear what Her Majesty's inspectorate did say in the most recent report. It found that in autumn 1983 there was over the country as a whole a small improvement in the levels of appropriate resources in schools and colleges, particularly as regards the provision of teachers and books.

Mr. Radice: Read the next sentence.

Sir Keith Joseph: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to say what I want to say.

I pointed many times to the significant improvement in pupil-teacher ratios under this Government. It is not just a statistical phenomenon. It is having its effect in schools. Thus, this year Her Majesty's inspectorate reported that in about one eighth of the schools visited their performance was judged to be adversely affected by one or both of an insufficient number of teachers, or by the presence of teachers whose initial qualifications and subsequent experience did not match the jobs required of them. Four years ago Her Majesty's inspectorate reported that almost one fifth of schools did not have satisfactory provision of teachers. That shows that there has been a marked improvement. Of course, there is scope for further advance, but the situation is not, as the hon. Gentleman implied, getting worse.

Mr. Radice: I hope that the House will forgive this textual analysis, but I did ask the Secretary of State to read out the sentence following the one which he quoted, and he did not. Let me read it now:

"But these improvements were patchy between and within LEAs, phases of education and institutions, and must be seen against the low baselines of some aspects of provision noted in previous years."

Sir Keith Joseph: Surely the hon. Gentleman is emphasising the point that I made. If the Labour Government had published Her Majesty's inspectorate's reports earlier, they would have revealed even worse base lines—that is what the report is saying—than they are legitimately criticising now.

[Sir Keith Joseph]

I accept that none of the HMI reports has presented a wholly satisfactory picture and that this year's was no exception. For instance, it drew particular attention, as the hon. Gentleman says, to the patchiness of improvements around the country—both betweeen LEAs and schools within authorities—and to the deterioration of school and college premises because of inadequate repairs and maintenance. On both counts I share the inspectorate's concern.

But we cannot solve the problems simply by spending vastly more. The country just cannot afford it. Unemployment would go even higher if we tried to do so. We must look also to the need to secure better value for the money that we are spending.

The HMI report is useful on that aspect, too. The inspectorate makes it clear that in many cases there is scope for bettter de[illegible]xisting resources and for better perceptions by heads [illegible] teachers of resources needed for good education, as well as, in some cases, absolute increases in the levels of resources.

Her Majesty's inspectorate identified the factors most commonly influencing effective learning as the quality of teaching, the identification of pupil and student needs, the levels of resources available, and the ability to manage and deploy those resources. It stated firmly that without clearer agreement about what it is that the resources are intended to help achieve and consequent careful planning and development, and without adequate and continuing training for teachers, the addition of more, different and better quality material resources will not of itself maintain present quality levels or lead to desirable changes and improvements.

That is the task that faces us, and in facing it we would all do well to avoid over-simplification of what is a complex question—the relationship between levels of resources for education and its quality.

I want to emphasise at this point what a difficult task teachers have if they are to be effective. That is why I regard the present teachers' salary structure talks as so important. They range across many aspects of teachers' work and recognise the need to relate that work and the way in which it is rewarded to changing circumstances.

The main ingredients of a successful outcome from those talks will provide for a closer relationship, more amenable to local education authority management, between teachers' pay, performance and responsibilities; a more precise definition of teachers' duties, including the supervision of pupils at midday and the provision of classroom cover for absent teachers; systematic arrangements for the formal appraisal of the performance of all teachers linked to provision for in-service training, promotion and deployment, and enabling the best teachers to be appropriately rewarded.

As I said in the House last Thursday, I should like to see a successful outcome from those talks because satisfactory agreements on those issues would lead to improvements in the quality of education offered by our schools. Therefore, I hope that the representatives of the local authorities and the teachers' unions engaged in the discussions will be successful, although I recognise the problems of bringing complex negotiations in that field to a satisfactory conclusion.

Reform proposals will need to pass three stringent tests if they are to come to fruition. First, they must be negotiable between the parties. Secondly, they need to be educationally acceptable and hold the realistic promise of delivering improvements in the classroom. Thirdly, they must be affordable. As for the latter, I hope that the teachers' leaders will not mislead their members, as they did earlier this year in the 1984 negotiations, as to what level of pay settlement might be regarded as reasonable.

The autumn statement made earlier this week by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor shows that the Government fully intend to keep faith with the inescapable fact that we cannot spend more on public services such as education than is consistent with the country's ability to pay. To do otherwise would put us back on the destructive road to wage-push inflation and still higher levels of unemployment.

The hon. Member for Durham, North asked me about the Sheffield speech and the progress under it. The speech announced the fourfold Government initiative that is intended, with the help of teachers, local education authorities and parents, to raise the standards of children of all abilities in our schools. I have never pretended that that speech did more than set in place the necessary conditions for the raising of standards.

I remind the House briefly that the four parallel initiatives cover the more rigorous selection and training of teachers, an attempt to reach a national agreement on the curriculum, a transformation of examinations towards clearer absolute assessment and the introduction of records of achievement so that children's performances outside the classroom can be assessed and recorded. All four initiatives are progressing according to the publicly announced timetable. Again, I cannot pretend that they have yet begun to have an effect, and I hope that no hon. Member will chide me for that, as there was never any pretence that they could have an instantaneous effect. However, the schedules are all as announced.

I turn to an area upon which I believe the whole House can unite in seeking more information. I refer to research into what explains the different standards in different schools. I announced in the House on 1 March 1984 that I had asked the Department to undertake two studies before considering the potential for further research into school standards. I have now received reports on the two studies and these will be published shortly. Copies are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The first of these studies extends the earlier analysis by the Department, published as statistical bulletin 16/83, of factors affecting examination results in different local education authority areas. It shows an even higher correlation—over 70 per cent.—than the earlier analysis between examination achievements at school and social background factors, probably reflecting the more recent information available for these factors. I explained in my earlier statement that it was expected that the extended study would provide limited insight into the effect of other factors on examination results. In the event, after taking account of the effect of social background—I stress that — the new study shows no more than a slight relationship at local authority level between pupils' examination achievements and the level of resources, including teaching resources, available to their schools, and a similarly slight statistical relationship with the proportion of pupils in grammar schools.

The second study was designed to examine the scope for carrying out further research on these relationships at the level of individual schools or groups of schools. This

study also shows a strong statistical relationship between examination results and social background factors, and again does not show a very substantial relationship with other factors such as the level of resources available to the schools. It also demonstrates the difficulty of extracting suitable data on social background factors from census material. Difficulties over the use and interpretation of data relevant to social background are also indicated by research commissioned by the Department and undertaken by the university of Leeds, which examined, inter alia, the development of suitable measures of home background. A report on this research is being prepared. I impose all this on the House because it is the background against which we can make further progress.

The two studies carried out by the Department thus show a strong relationship between school pupils' examination results and socio-economic background, but they shed little light on the influence of other factors on school pupils' performance, or on the wide variation in examination achievements among pupils from similar socio-economic backgrounds. I believe that it would now be research into the factors giving rise to this wide variation, which may be factors related to the way the school carries out its work rather than external to the school, which is likely to be most relevant to the development of the Government's policies for improving standards in schools, particularly if the research also includes other measures of pupil performance.

I have concluded that I would not be justified in providing funds for more research along the lines of the Department's recent studies. I am, however, willing to consider proposals for research ranging more widely and exploring the relationship between the social background of pupils collected at the level of individual pupils, a range of school outputs including public examinations, and a range of school inputs such as resources, the achievements of pupils on entry to secondary schools, teaching quality, the organisation of the school and its internal practices including teacher expectations, curriculum continuity and homework. Such research would be complex and expensive and could not be expected to yield results in less than three years. I shall want the Department to discuss any proposals in detail with the applicants before I decide on financial support.

Since that offers help only over the middle distance, I shall tell the House of a new initiative that may help in the slightly nearer future. Hon. Members will be aware that in announcing the Government's decision to adopt a single system of examination at 16, the Government also announced their intention that there should be distinction awards to recognise the breadths and levels of performance of those whose new GCSE grades and subjects reach a defined standard. The Government intend to add another level below distinction to encourage both the breadth and level of performance. Below the distinction award, we propose to introduce an award that will be called a merit award, which will recognise a breadth and level of achievement that is lower than that of the distinction award but which is still commendably wide and high. I hope that that will prove to be a further stimulus towards excellence.

Mr. Radice: Is that not reintroducing the O-level by another name?

Sir Keith Joseph: No such thought is in my mind. The award stands self-justified by its objective. In due course, I shall spell out the definition.

The Government and I were chided for the announced increase in the parental contributions made to some students in higher education. However, the Government have no plans to charge parents the same amount as overseas students. The purpose of that extra contribution is, first, to meet the cost of higher student awards; and secondly, to enable the Government to provide some more badly-needed money for basic research in universities and through the research councils. I believe that the strong national asset of basic scientific research should be supported in that way, and that is why the Government have asked the families of students to pay the extra contributions.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. Friend will appreciate the problem of many of his supporters, who find it very difficult to justify this increasing tax on families, many of whom have other children at home and large financial commitments as a result, when at the same time we are increasing the payment to farmers who have had a bumper record harvest this year. Is there no way of squaring this circle? How does my right hon. Friend intend to deal with those students who have obtained places in higher education and who are deemed to be receiving parental contributions sufficient to pay towards the fees, if the parents do not cough up the money? Will there be sentries on the gates to stop them getting into their classes, or what will happen?

Sir Keith Joseph: I have no answer to either limb of my hon. Friend's question. The world is not a perfect place and no Government have yet managed to secure that all parents provide what their children need. That means that those children must show initiative in coping with the problem. Mercifully, I am not responsible for agriculture.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does not the Secretary of State agree that it is important that all young people should be treated equally? Does he realise that some girls whose parents come from the Indian sub-continent have considerable problems because their parents do not consider that they should go on to higher education? Consequently, their parents will not fill in the application form for a grant; thus, although the family may be on an extremely low income, those girls will lose any grant. Furthermore, they will have to find their own fees if they go on to higher education. Is that not an extremely unfortunate development from those proposals?

Sir Keith Joseph: If the hon. Gentleman has a way of overcoming the problem I should be glad to hear it.

I hope that I have answered the questions asked by the hon. Member for Durham, North. I can report to the House that we are on schedule with the Sheffield policies, but we do not expect instant transformation from them. I have announced various initiatives in research and for the encouragement of standards. I have explained our support for discussions between local education authorities and teacher organisations which are broadly encouraging. I ask the House to vote for the amendment and against the Opposition motion.

4.40 pm

Mr. Sean Hughes (Knowsley, South): I am pleased that in the preface to his remarks the Secretary of State said that he was sure that both sides of the House were interested in improving education standards. Time and again his party has postured as the party committed to the

[Mr. Sean Hughes]

maintenance and improvement of standards and quality. Tory Members have often pointed their fingers at the Opposition Benches and implied — if they have not openly accused — that we were opposed to good standards and quality in education. It is time to expose the fallacious premise on which the Tory party's claim is made.

After five years of Conservative Government and their proudly proclaimed commitment to quality and standard in education, what is the reality? In 1975 the Bullock report emphasised the importance of literacy, stressing that the ability to read was crucial, not just because we were becoming a society of form-fillers, but because the inability to read seriously impinges on individual freedom. A browse of *Hansard* just after the publication of that report reveals various examples of Government Members stressing the need for literacy and increased book provision in schools.

The Conservative party manifesto is not my favourite reading One section is entitled

"Schools: The pursuit of excellence."

In response to the HMI paper on the curriculum entitled

"English from 5 to 16"

the Secretary of State emphasised the essential part that the teaching of English must play in the school curriculum. He said that English was

"a tool and a channel of learning in all subjects for the great majority of pupils in England and Wales."

On 6 November the Government pledged themselves to continue to develop policies to raise education standards. We must examine how the claims are borne out by the facts, as opposed to the soothing statements from the Department of Education and Science. I do not doubt the good faith of the Secretary of State and many Government Members. If they are committed to quality in education and the laudable aims in the Bullock report, we can presume that they have a commitment to the provision of books in schools. Reading is impossible without reading material. I am reminded of "Desert Island Discs" when the presenter asks a composer whether he would take records or scores to the island. The composer always chooses scores on the ground that he can hear the music in his head. We cannot expect teachers to tell the class, "Turn to page 57 of the textbook—in your head."

In 1978-79 expenditure on primary school books was £19·9 million. In 1982-83 it was £27·9 million. Taking into account a 14 per cent. drop in pupil numbers and the book price inflation rate, expenditure should now be £29·2 million. The shortfall is £1·3 million.

National averages and national figures are meaningless in a country with such huge regional variations. In my borough of Knowsley spending on books per primary school pupil was £4·52 in 1982-83. That sum was worth only £2·65 at 1978-79 prices. The drop is 12·8 per cent., using the book price index. Knowsley spends 41 per cent. of its total budget on education. It is all the more surprising that the Secretary of State, when asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) whether he would seek additional money for education, replied that he was not convinced that, overall, more was needed. The minuscule increase in the Chancellor's statement does not alter that. I wonder what sort of earthquake it will take to convince the Secretary of State and other Ministers of the need for more expenditure on education.

There are areas of utter wretchedness in the country, although one might not have thought so when listening to the Chancellor's statement on Monday. Part and parcel of that wretchedness is educational deprivation. John Hughes wrote in *The Guardian* on 4 September:

"To focus the discussion on the links between poverty and deprivation in our communities and an improvised state education system is to raise issues of inequality in their most acute form. For we are not only neglecting and wasting human capital and potential on a vast scale; we are palpably undermining the assumptions, palpably repudiating the necessary value systems of any mature political and social democracy."

The reality is that in the deprived regions everything mitigates against an individual's educational development. Massive unemployment rates, a decaying environment, life in an overcrowded upstairs maisonette, hardly creates an atmosphere conducive to self-fulfilment. The oasis of hope in such an environment has been the school. However, there, too, morale is collapsing.

Expenditure cuts have their visible effects in fewer books and equipment, deteriorating buildings and, as the HMI report of May 1984 states:

"In some cases the circumstances in which education takes place and the availability of appropriate resources in the right quantity was found to be such as to make worthwhile learning well-nigh impossible."

Equally pernicious, if not more so, is the invisible effect of expenditure cuts — the collapse of morale among parents, pupils and teachers. The Government emphasise such issues as parental choice, but we all know that parental choice works on the assumption that the majority of parents will not exercise it. Parents' morale is collapsing because reality for them in areas such as Knowsley is a dole queue, shortage of money and life in an area with a total lack of educational ethos. Parental choice for them is a sick and irrelevant joke.

Teachers' morale is collapsing in a contracting profession. Avenues of promotion are being closed rapidly. After 10 years, many teachers are simply worn out. Of course, there are good and bad teachers—there is good and bad in every profession. There are even good and bad Secretaries of State. But to hammer the teachers, as some Conservative Members do, when those teachers often give their all throughout an exhausting period is no way to improve standards and quality in our education system.

We must also consider pupil morale. I would like to see those centres of excellence referred to in the Tory manifesto in all our deprived areas. However, we must understand where we are now if we are realistically to build for the future. We are faced with the appalling paradox that it is in the areas of highest unemployment and greatest deprivation that the pressure is on the young people to leave school at 16.

In the MSC briefing on the careers service in London, it was noted that Barnet, with a staying-on rate at 16 of 72 per cent., found that 33 per cent. of those who left school were unlikely to find jobs. In Tower Hamlets, with a staying-on rate of 41 per cent., 62 per cent. of those who left school were unlikely to find jobs. My borough has a staying-on rate of 46 per cent., but during the past three years, first 85 per cent., and now 80 per cent., of our school leavers have been without permanent employment. That seriously affects what we are trying to do in our schools.

The Secretary of State told the House last week that it was a question of the relevance of the curriculum, the effectiveness of the teachers and support from the home.

He should have realised that those are precisely the things now at risk in the current climate of educational expenditure. That is why I place emphasis on the provision of books. The Secretary of State and the Government must realise the harsh, unpalatable fact that many youngsters, once they leave school, will never read a book again. School is the only place where people can be introduced to reading as something worthwhile in itself.

The HMI report commented on the instances of unsatisfactory educational provision. These relate precisely to the children who do not have a second chance for a decent education. That is why I was struck by the Secretary of State's choice of words in his speech last week. He used the word "affordability". I have checked a few dictionaries, but could not find any reference to that word. Unfortunately the Conservative party see affordability—if I must use that dreadful word—in money terms only. Just for once tonight, I hope that Conservative Members will discuss it in its wider context.

How can we, as a society, afford to waste the talents of so many of our young people? Even from a utilitarian point of view, it is crazy to squander the nation's single greatest resource. From the individual view—shared by those of us who, perhaps naively, see education as the means of self-fulfilment and enrichment and a means of conquering the often squalid conditions in which so many of our young people are born—affordability, as defined by the Secretary of State, demonstrates how the Government have all their priorities wrong. That is why I hope that the House will reject the amendment and support the motion.

4.54 pm

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): The hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. Hughes) mentioned teachers' pay. I welcome my right hon. Friend's remarks about the salary structure talks. Like him, and all hon. Members, I hope that they will be successful. It is essential to avoid another period of the classroom disruption that we saw earlier this year. Not only is that bad for classroom morale, but it runs strongly against the Government's efforts to raise standards and is destabilising for both teachers and children.

One thing that might help the public, and the teachers themselves, when considering the cost of salaries and the totality of education spending is a system by which we could know the actual running costs of each school. Parents and others could then see what it really costs, on a carefully broken-down basis, to run each school. Those figures should include any debt charges resulting from those schools having been built relatively recently.

I appreciate the problems of monitoring performance and rewarding efficiency in the teaching profession. The salary talks will be difficult. However, there is a case for asking for outside industrial advice if the talks run into difficulties. Industry has for many years monitored efficiency and rewarded performance and those involved in the teachers' negotiations could learn much from that.

The status of teachers is important. The changing role of their job and the need for more in-service training is changing public attitudes towards the profession. It is especially important for teachers to realise that they should be a stabilising influence on the children they teach. We must bear in mind the general unease caused by unemployment in many homes and, alas, the fact that so many children come from single-parent homes. Before we again find ourselves in any of the difficulties that we have experienced this year, I hope that the teaching profession will ponder long and hard on the influences for good that they can bring to bear.

There have been many quotations from the HMI report, especially by the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice). He left out one point that he should have included in his speech. In the principal findings section of the report it states:

> "It is apparent that teachers, schools, colleges and LEAs are providing an adequate education for the majority of pupils and students."

Mr. Radice: I acknowledged that point when quoting. I gave my impression, having visited more than 50 schools and colleges throughout the country.

Mr. Madel: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but Conservative Members would have appreciated greater emphasis on that point, especially as the hon. Gentleman spoke about what the Government should try to do.

The report says that the level of resources available and the ability to manage and deploy them by all levels in the service depends to a great extent on proper management of resources. It states:

> "In secondary schools, poor management of resources by the department or individual teacher was a particularly critical factor associated with those lessons seen in which the work was judged less than satisfactory."

That emphasises what Conservative Members have said in many of our debates. Unless the resources are properly and effectively managed, poor learning occurs and little is achieved—the very things that we all want to avoid.

My right hon. Friend, in a written answer on 12 November, referred to the provision for in-service training. If we do not improve that, the anxieties referred to in the HMI report will not be allayed. My right hon. Friend said:

> "Grant of £17·5 million will be available in the 1985-86 financial year."

My right hon. Friend then identified three projects, two of which are especially important in improving our education service. One is a special programme to support the introduction of the general certificate of secondary education, and the other is the teaching of craft, design and technology in schools. I hope that included in the budget figure will be an element to ensure that in managing those projects teachers will have an opportunity of learning something about management development and general ability to manage financial resources. The new examination system and the necessary improvement in craft, design and technology cannot be effective unless those managing them are up to date in the management of resources. I hope that some money will be available within the budget of £17·5 million for that purpose.

I commend the Government for their support for the establishment of British school technology. I do so for what British school technology is doing to encourage the development of technological education within schools and for the way in which it is helping in practical ways by running in-service courses for teachers and helping authorities plan and organise their provision in technolgical areas. It is a pity that no mention was made of that by the hon. Member for Durham, North. That is a definite plus to the Government, to the education service and to young people passing through the education service.

[Mr. Madel]

I fully support what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is doing in his new system of examinations in laying greater emphasis on practical tests. However, according to the Joint Council of Examination Boards, some schools do not as yet have the facilities to ensure that practical tests in science can be effectively carried out. An adjustment in local authority spending will be essential if practical tests in science are to be fully carried out in line with what the Government are proposing for the new system of examinations. Where local authorities do that and have to spend more to ensure that what they provide can cope with the practical tests, I hope that there will be no danger of their falling foul of any penalties for overspending or colliding with the Department of the Environment when it comes to rate support grant provision.

In the long written answer of 12 November there emerged what the Government foresee happening in non-advanced further education. One important sentence reads:

"There are inevitable uncertainties about student numbers. The plans"—

these are the plans for non-advanced further education—

"assume some limited increase in the participation rate of 16 and 17-year-olds in future years."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 56.]

Those two sentences highlight a growing problem for young people if they want to return to non-advanced education or go straight on to it from school. We have the complicated 21-hour rule and 12-hour study rule which determine whether a student will receive benefit.

The ability to be trained and retrained is essential to careers, and much depends on the lengths and levels of initial education attainment and access to continuous education and training after a person has left school. By altering the rules on benefit in a sensible cost-conscious way we can bring more young people back into the education system if they cannot get a job and ensure that they and the country benefit from the many excellent education facilities that we have. I am not advocating a blank cheque or vastly increased spending. I am suggesting that, in view of all the new courses in schools and the improvement in schools, especially in technical education, a growing number of young people will probably want to come back after school into education and benefit from it. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that student financial support is sensible and reasonable for those young people.

5.4 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): In the debate on the Gracious Speech last Tuesday the Prime Minister referred to the need to expand support for wealth-creating free enterprise rather than a wealth-consuming public sector. The Secretary of State's comments this afternoon have echoed that sentiment. It is important to recognise at the start of a debate on education that the public sector provides a major contribution to creating the nation's wealth and that an educated population's ability to provide economic success as well as social success is dependent on ensuring that we have the best standard of education that we can afford.

I suggest that the Secretary of State has not addressed himself this afternoon to whether we can get the best standard that we can afford. It seems that the Government are not prepared to afford as much as is necessary even to maintain standards, let alone improve them.

There is a good reason for considering ways of improving the quality of education and it is right that money is not the only answer, but parents, as well as teachers and children, are aware of the almost weekly reduction in standards and availability of support within our schools. The Government will pay a high price if they fail to recognise the strength of feeling among parents when they see a clear reduction in standards within schools that has a specific effect on their children.

Some interesting observations have been made on the discussions on teachers' pay and conditions. If we knew no different, we might think that the Secretary of State was engaged in a free-ranging discussion on teachers' pay and conditions with a view to making a fair and proper assessment of their role in society. However, we all know that constraints within the education budget allow for a total increase in the wage bill of only 3 per cent. With those constraints, it is not possible to have a proper discussion on what teachers' relative pay should be. Their pay should reflect their proper position in society when set against other forms of employment and our objective in ensuring that we have a motivated teaching profession. Secondly, their pay should reflect the work that they are expected to do. We are expecting them to cope with an increasing work load with rapidly changing curricula.

Mr. Powley: The hon. Gentleman is advancing a valid argument, but if the Government were able, within the constraints that he has mentioned, to allocate more resources to education, how would he devise a system whereby the extra resources were directed to the maintenance of school buildings and the provision of books and pencils, for example, and not to a higher proportion of the total allocation being taken in teachers' salaries?

Mr. Bruce: I would accept that argument if I were not aware that the Government have not afforded to education the protection that they have claimed to afford to the Health Service, for example. They are using opportunities within the education service to reduce the real commitment to education. That is where the difference lies between the Government's approach to education and other parts of the public sector. The majority of parents would resist and reject a declared reduction in overall and real funding in education, but that is what we are seeing. The Government quote statistics such as expenditure per pupil against the background of falling numbers and falling rolls, but they know, as do parents, that in individual schools class sizes are found frequently to be growing while available resources are frequently falling.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): It is necessary in this sort of debate to discuss the level of resourcing of the education service, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that the main issue should be whether the available money is being spent effectively and not so much the amount of money that should be spent?

Mr. Bruce: I agree with that. However, there has been an erosion of teachers' pay over the past few years, and it appears from what the Secretary of State has been saying that teachers can expect their real pay to be reduced still

further in coming years. If that happens, we shall have a demoralised teaching profession. Teachers are already leaving their profession, and almost by definition it is the best who leave because they are the ones who receive the best offers outside the profession. The erosion of teachers' pay will discourage the right quality of person from entering the profession. I suggest that the erosion has occurred to such an extent that we are likely to suffer real damage in terms of the quality of teachers, because the Government have not yet conceded the need to take account of that fact.

Mr. Bernard Conlan (Gateshead, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: I must continue. I do not have much time.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West) *rose*——

Mr. Bruce: I have given way twice. I want to make a number of points.

Mr. Conlan: I might help the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman might help me more by allowing me to develop my argument.

I have a thick file of letters that I have received from parents about the specific problems they are experiencing at all levels of education and about the cuts that are affecting them.

Mr. Conlan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: If the alliance were allocated another speaker in this debate, I would be more than happy to give way. I should like to make the best use of my time and I must, therefore, continue.

I shall work through the main areas of education and show where the shortfall is taking place. I shall start with the youngest in our society. I cannot remember the exact quotation, but I believe that the Prime Minister, when Secretary of State for Education and Science, placed great store on the expansion of nursery education. Since the right hon. Lady became Prime Minister, however, there has been no such expansion. There has been a freezing, if not a contraction.

Mr. Dunn: The voluntary sector has expanded.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the voluntary side has expanded. That is the point that I was just about to make. Play groups and nursery schools are not the same, although they apply themselves to the same age group. Play groups have expanded rapidly. In the absence of alternative provision, play groups do a good job. I have had considerable contact with the play group movement, and I know that it is finding it increasingly difficult to accept responsibility in an area in which the Government do not accept responsibility. The operation of play groups is, properly, constrained by Government legislation. That constraint affects costs. The play groups have to run services, which must be paid for by parents. The play groups are effectively means-tested and the variation in charges is considerable. The cost per child can be extremely high in a community where there is a lack of accommodation and facilities. The position becomes extremely difficult for a parent with two pre-school age children, and those on low incomes may find it impossible. If the Government argue that the voluntary sector has expanded, they should show a little more willingness to help by reducing operating costs. I stress that I do not believe that play groups are a substitute for nursery schools; they are a complementary service.

Because of falling primary school rolls and Government constraints making local authorities reduce the number of teachers so as to get costs down, there is a definite loss of quality. There is a real cut in the availability of support teaching. There are increases in class sizes and more composite classes. Those aspects are observable. Parents are aware of them and do not like them. In the school attended by my son the provision of subjects such as art, physical education, music and drama has been cut in one blow, across the board, by 25 per cent. In some schools there has been a cut of 50 per cent. The cut means that, where there was one art period a week, there is now one a fortnight. If the art period falls on a holiday Monday, there is only one art period in the month. It is hardly worth the bother of having an art period—but I must not give the Under-Secretary of State ideas. I believe that most parents feel that the previous minimum is the least that they should expect. They are not impressed when the Government say that the expenditure cuts are not leading to real cuts in the educational provision. In my book, there is a real and perceptible cut, which parents rightly resist. Parents are filling my postbag with their complaints.

The position in secondary schools rightly gives most cause for concern. Although children suffer if their preparation in primary schools is not good, the prospects of those children who are caught in a bad time at secondary school are most at risk. The Secretary of State referred to changing teaching methods and changing curricula in secondary schools. Dedicated teachers are expected to provide more pupil-teacher contact, and most have responded to that need. Teachers are expected to undertake more preparation, yet often they must do so with fewer resources and less pay.

What is happening in Scotland should be of interest to the rest of the country, because we are pioneering the new secondary school curriculum. I assure the House that, although the net result is potentially exciting, the curriculum is worrying in practice. The implementation of the new curriculum involves each teacher and each school in preparing their own courses, producing the material for those courses and assessing substantially the quality of the work produced. That involves a massive amount of additional preparation work outside normal contractual time. Teachers are doing that willingly, but, as the Under-Secretary of State knows, some teachers feel that it is imposing an unacceptable burden. Regrettably, but perhaps understandably, some of those teachers are refusing to implement the new curriculum in the hope of forcing the Government to take some action on pay and conditions. I believe that all hon. Members think that such action is regrettable.

What can I or the Under-Secretary of State say when teachers state that the Government do not take notice of them when they are dedicated and get on with the job? The teachers say, "They just exploit us. They take advantage. How can we persuade the Government that we have a fair case if they consistently ignore us when we are reasonable?" The teachers have so far been extremely reasonable, because they value the parent-teacher relationship and know that industrial action in schools is damaging. I do not believe that any hon. Member would deny the fact that industrial action should be avoided at all

[Mr. Bruce]

costs. The Government should not exploit teachers shamelessly when they know that there is a real grievance that must be redressed.

It is not simply a matter of saying, "Give the teachers more money, and the job will be done." During the past week, I completed a tour of all the secondary schools in my constituency. Teachers are frustrated and angry. They say that giving more money would not solve the problem and that what they have been asked to do is virtually impossible. I have met teachers who have had to work through the night as well as on Saturdays and Sundays to get material ready. They have had to photocopy great quantities of material and to produce audio-visual material — yet there has been no increase in the resources budget. Not one penny more has been allocated.

It is hardly surprising that the whole situation could well come crashing down about the Government's ears. I regret the fact that there is no Minister from the Scottish Office present to listen to this debate. I would impress upon a Scottish Minister the fact that he must recognise that the position in Scotland requires an independent review body on teachers' pay. If such a review is not granted soon, the secondary school curriculum will fall apart around the Minister's ears. I am worried not about what will happen to the Minister but about what will happen to the children who will be caught in the consequences. I hope that the Secretary of State will take account of those children.

Teachers in Scotland are being asked, with no extra resources and no real evaluation, to introduce not only the new Munn and Dunning curriculum but the 10-to-14 action plan and the 16-to-18 action plan. Any reasonable Government must recognise that if they want teacher motivation and delivery of services, they must treat teachers differently.

I regret the fact that certain Conservative Members have sought to divide parents from teachers and to exploit a difficult situation. I suggest that those Conservative Members will not succeed. Teachers and parents must be on the same side — on the side of the children — to persuade the Government to provide the necessary resources. It is not helpful for chairmen of education committees to say that parents have been spoilt. It is not helpful for those chairmen to say, "In the past we have given parents too much, and they should be prepared to accept these cuts simply as a recognition of the fact that we have been far too generous in the past." Such statements are not helpful. They are even less helpful when they come from councillors and people in authority who are taking decisions and are not even sending their children to the schools that they administer. I feel that if they did—this is not just a cheap point—they might show more interest in what is going on in the schools they have opted out of.

Mr. Hind: The hon. Gentleman is talking about the Government driving a wedge between teachers and parents. Does he not feel that the positive moves that the Government have made to put teachers and parents side by side on governing bodies is completely contrary to what he has said, and is a clear sign of the Government's desire to unite parents and teachers in a partnership for the benefit of the pupils in the schools?

Mr. Bruce: I am not sure that I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I rather suspect that the Secretary of State's motivation was precisely the opposite, because it was an attempt to try to undermine respect for teachers.

Of course parents should be more involved in the running of schools, but the professional has also to be able to make professional decisions. I hope that the Secretary of State will produce a revised proposal that will take account of the fact that parents should be involved but that the professionals, nevertheless, should not be undermined. I accept the sincerity behind the question, but the object is to ensure that parents and teachers work collectively for the benefit of the children and, if necessary—I believe that it is necessary — collectively to show the Government their dissatisfaction with the lack of resources.

I am interested in special schools. Increasingly the ideal is to try as far as possible to integrate children from special schools into ordinary schools. One or two authorities have, perhaps mischievously, misconstrued that as a way of undermining special schools. The evidence suggests that the integration—which will require specially qualified staff and support—within the environment of the mixed ability and ordinary schools requires resources. That move is progressing relatively slowly.

I am interested in the teaching of the deaf as I have a deaf daughter. She is at the Aberdeen school for the deaf. There are one or two proposals that might have caused anxiety to those involved in teaching the deaf. The first is the report of the Advisory Committee on the Supply and Education of Teachers which suggests that the Government might consider not requiring a specialist qualification for teachers of the deaf in future. I should be grateful, and so would a great many other people who are involved, if the Minister could assure us that he had no intention of pursuing that recommendation, and that he recognises that teachers of the deaf need special qualifications, as they always have in the past, and that they should continue to have them.

Will the Minister also give more positive encouragement to introducing an opportunity for deaf people to teach deaf people? It is undesirable that all teachers of the deaf should be deaf, but it is also undesirable that those deaf people who have something to contribute should be excluded from the profession for what to some extent seem to be bureaucratic reasons. I believe that it would be a great advance if the Government could provide more positive encouragement for that.

Although this is a debate about schools and further education, it is true that many of the people going through our schools are looking forward to going into further education and universities. The measures that the Government have proposed include reduced grants and the abolition of the minimum grant. There is a suggestion that up to 11,000 students will have to pay a full-cost £520 contribution towards their fees. That is a burden that should not be imposed and one that is likely to fall unfairly on those students. The Government should not move further down that road, as they are effectively taking from many people the opportunity to benefit from the further education that they wish to enjoy.

While I and my colleagues appreciate that there is a genuine need to improve the quality of education, and to consider methods of improving it, that is rather subjective, and cannot be done by cutting resources. If the Government do not take seriously the representations that

are made and the detailed information that they are receiving from their inspectorate — that real cuts in resources are having real and damaging effect on education, which will become worse over the next year or two if the Government's policies persist—the generation going through our schools today will live bitterly to regret the fact that they went through under this Thatcher Government. I and my colleagues will be voting with the Labour Opposition.

5.24 pm

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): It is inevitable that the Inner London education authority should feature early as an example in any debate about value for money in education. Casting my mind back, I realise that I have been involved with inner London education in one way or another for more than 40 years.

Throughout that time, parents, teachers and ordinary people in the street have pleaded that the provision of education should be less political. I can understand what they mean by that. We recognise, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, that there is common ground between us — education is about providing the skills which allow a child to develop into an adult and to live a fulfilling and rewarding life. The difficulty in the past has been how that common ground can be achieved and by what policies. There have been political differences about policy. In inner London, as is inevitable all over the country, the education authority has been politically divided.

I wish to draw the attention of the House to a further aspect. Education in London has become more political over the past decade than ever before. The signs are that it will become more political still. In the 1960s and early 1970s many saw that an education authority was an implement for social engineering and social change. It could be done by the adaptation of the curriculum, by the programming of teachers along certain learning paths. Attitudes in society should be changed rather than giving learning skills to pupils.

That was a development which should be noted with some anxiety. Over the past few years, the politicising of education has gone a stage further. With the present administration of the ILEA there are one or two features at which we should look with greater care and anxiety. During the past few days ILEA's leadership has said that it feels that it has been misrepresented in the House. It is worth, therefore, identifying one or two points that we can see emerging.

I suggest tentatively that the present leadership of ILEA sees the ILEA as being not just an instrument for education or an implement for social change, but a weapon with which to conduct warfare against the Government on a front rather wider than education. The redeployment of resources has been the opportunity to join battle. We have seen evidence of it in the past months. One may ask how such a situation has come to pass. I suggest that there has been a systematic approach over a number of years. There has been an attempt to ensure that those elected on the Left of the Labour party are prepared to subscribe to the party's 39 articles of belief and to ensure that they do not step out of line and express any views contrary to that belief. That is perhaps something that we must accept as being part of the to and fro, the give and take of political life in the elective area. We can recognise it as an overt political division, and I do not make any harsh judgment on that basis.

We have seen, however, a change whereby the members of the authority have sought to see that the political divisions permeate to other levels. There is clear evidence over the past few years that many senior appointments in the administration have been made or at least coloured by the political persuasion of those who seek those appointments. Not only has this trend affected the officers of the authority, but it has been noticeable in the appointment of the governors who are political nominees. Political associations appoint some of the Labour governors on the various governing bodies of the schools. We have seen evidence that those associations have made it a requirement that those governors do not represent views that they hold personally, but should subscribe to and vote along lines that are put to them before the meetings take place. Therefore, there has been an opportunity to affect decisions and make sure that the attitudes of members of governing bodies and of the officers to some extent politically coincide.

But things have gone a stage further. Over the past few years, there has been a development in the appointment of head teachers. I have sat on head teacher panels in ILEA for several years. In the early days, there was a requirement to assess the candidates to see whether they were of the right educational calibre to give leadership and of the right administrative ability to preside over a whole round of activities, which the head of a school is required to do. However, today there have been clear signs from the questions that have been asked of an intention to probe the political attitudes of candidates. I am not saying that that is happening in every case, but it is happening in a significant number of cases. We should be alert to that factor and take such steps as may be necessary in due course.

We have seen that attitude in the appointment of head teachers and again in teacher training, where political attitudes are explicit in many courses of study. I should like to give an anecdotal example of a mature teacher who had been teaching for many years, and was very experienced, but who lacked the teacher qualification— the licence to preach — that would be necessary in future. Therefore, she sought an in-service training scheme that would allow her to get that qualification. She was among several other mature students on that course. They found it a salutary experience in one way that mature teachers were being instructed in the art of teaching by those who had little or no classroom experience. That was stimulating enough, but what stuck in their gullet, the point that annoyed them most and that they could not swallow, was the fact that the philosophy put forward in the course was so totally alien to their experience of what was right in the classroom, where there was a neutral political standpoint and an objective point of view. They were told that explicit political attitudes were right and proper. Mature students with classroom experience can assess the quality of what is being put before them and discard the dross, but those who do not have that experience, especially young teachers, are not so well able to judge, so the situation is more ambiguous and bewildering for them.

There is also evidence that in inner London the curriculum itself is being manipulated somewhat cynically towards political ends. Several courses might be seen as

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politically desirable at the Fabian summer school, but it is not appropriate to teach them to children in inner London, who need to gain the skills that will give them the opportunity to make their way in the world and earn their living in later life.

These things are happening concurrently and tend towards a certain end. That end has become apparent in recent weeks. It is apparent that ILEA is on a conflict course with the Government and the Secretary of State. One can see that these elements that I have sought to identify are now being mobilised. I received a letter the other day from a constituent who said:

"My son is a pupil at"

a school in my constituency.

"Today I received a letter from the school, signed by the Headmaster"—

he names the headmaster—

"saying that the school will be closed on 7 November because members of the National Union of Teachers will be taking strike action as a protest against ILEA budget proposals and the imposition of Rate Capping on the Authority's finances."

Such an approach is an abuse of a head teacher's position. It is an abuse of an authority's position. It should not use children as the emissaries of such a political message. There is an important issue here, but it should not be fought in the classroom. Such approaches are entirely reprehensible. My correspondent continues:

"The letter goes on to request parents to register their views with their Members of Parliament."

That is why my constituent wrote to me. He adds:

"May I assure you of my wholehearted support for the Government's action in bringing this spendthrift authority back to reality . . . ILEA must be prevented from squandering any more millions of pounds of ratepayers' money. As a Southwark ratepayer I feel doubly penalised."

Interestingly enough, in this case the approach was counter-productive, but few parents have the courage to write such a letter in the face of authority. Few parents who thought that would dare say it. Few governors who felt that could say it in open meetings where they are in a minority. There are some sinister elements that should be identified and brought out into the open if we are discussing whether ILEA has a good case for being rate capped, for redeploying its resources or being considered special. The present administration of ILEA is not presenting a good case. In fact, it is letting down the children of inner London.

To end on a more optimistic note, I congratulate the Secretary of State on making sure that the ILEA of the future remains a unitary body serving deprived areas of inner London as well as more prosperous areas, and at the same time ensuring that it is a directly elected and democratically sensitive body that can recognise educational need in inner London and make an assessment of the proper price that should be paid in achieving the standards that we require.

5.37 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I do not want to follow the hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) down that avenue, except to say that, as a former education administrator, I always look to the professionals of ILEA as examples of the height of professionalism and as representing all that is truly progressive in the education service. The hon. Gentleman's description of what is going on in ILEA was not credible, but he knows his own area best.

I shall confine most of my remarks to non-advanced further education. The education service resents some of the messages that come from Conservative Members—although not from the Secretary of State—who denigrate all those who serve in the public service. It has become almost a dirty word to many Conservative Members to say that one works in the public sector. It is as if everyone who worked in the public sector was an inferior animal who would be working in the private sector if only he could get a proper job.

I have worked in the public, private and voluntary sectors. The level of dedication in the public sector is at least the equal of that in the private sector, where the rewards and the perks of the job are so much greater. I should like to put on record the Opposition's appreciation of the dedication of teachers, administrators, cleaners, caretakers and dinner ladies to the state education service.

I wish that Conservative Members understood how much their ill-thought-out statements about the public service affect the morale of those who work in it. There is a crisis of morale in the teaching profession, and the Secretary of State would do well to address himself to it. I was glad to hear him recognise the difficulty of the teachers' task, because it is not widely recognised. We should all say how extremely difficult it is to teach today when many of the old models of authority have been broken. Many teachers wrestle with problems which their predecessors of 30 or 40 years ago would not have recognised or been able to cope with. We should all support the teachers, who are trying to contend with the many social problems which society is throwing up. Parents are often unable to deal with them, as are the social services. All too often such problems fall to be dealt with by teachers, heads of department or head teachers.

Some people like to pretend that all teachers live in a cloistered atmosphere and are unaware of and uninterested in the problems of the real world, but many people in further education have worked in industry and commerce and are only too familiar with their problems. That sector of the education service is at the interface between education and training and industry and commerce. It is difficult to cope at that interface.

In the past few years further education has had to wrestle with the repercussions of the collapse of manufacturing industry. That collapse has devastated large parts of the country, especially County Durham. My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) and I are all too familiar with the devastation that has resulted from the destruction of jobs in the area. It has been difficult to sustain the education service in those circumstances. The involvement of employers in training has often collapsed even faster than industry. Further education has had to find students and then contend with the impact of advanced technology. Some hon. Members are more or less experts on the repercussions of advanced technology, but most of us are unaware of them, especially in education and training. The uncertainties of advanced technology have to be coped with daily.

I remind the Secretary of State that the education and training part of the education service is at the sharp end of our problems over competitiveness. It can be argued that the further education service has a greater contribution to make to the country's competitiveness, to our ability to handle the impact of advanced technology and to cope with the social and economic changes that are riding roughshod over many parts of the country. People who

provide further education and training must therefore not be ignored or denigrated. They do not live in a cloistered atmosphere. They have always had to draw their students from industry and commerce and have had to prove to industry that their courses are relevant and that the quality of their teaching is high.

Mrs. Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said and agree with much of it. Does he agree that the Department of Environment's initiative is absolutely right, as it ensures that people in colleges of further education have the full benefit of working in concert with employers and that they, with money provided by the Manpower Services Commission, will supply the very technology and information that people in colleges need?

Mr. Foster: I do not entirely agree with the hon. Lady. I was about to consider that matter, so, if she will bear with me, I might be able to agree with some of what she said.

We face a great problem over how to implement change in the education service. Every Secretary of State for Education and Science has wrestled with the problem of getting people in the education service to agree a plan of action and then to achieve a set of objectives. It is understandable that Secretaries of State want more power to achieve change, but decision making in the education service is diffuse. We have to persuade local education authorities, colleges, heads of department, boards of governors, perhaps academic boards and teachers, that what we have decided is best.

Many people in the education service long to impose change. We are impatient for it, as it never goes as fast as we should like. Politicians might have only a short run. The Secretary of State has been with us for a long time —some might say too long—and he might continue in office for some time yet. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] At least he has the support of his Back Benchers. He has been fortunate in that he has been able to pursue a course of action and see it through. What puzzles me is that he has not chosen to take on the authorities or to change the constitutional arrangements by which education is administered. Rather he has chosen to stand on one side. The Secretary of State has chosen to turn a blind eye while the further education service has been raped by the Manpower Services Commission.

Mr. J. F. Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): That conjures up an interesting picture.

Mr. Foster: Perhaps at some other time we may discuss the implications of rape in relation to the MSC.

Where was the Secretary of State when the decision was made to take a quarter of the further education service from the local education authorities? What part did he play in those discussions? Did he feel that he was doing education a service when he allowed that to happen? Did he not owe it to the education service to stand up for it and fight in its corner? How will he be able to deliver the good will of the education service — of the local education authorities, the colleges, the principals and the heads of department — when he stands on one side and allows them to be dealt with in that way by the MSC?

Sir Keith Joseph: Because I take the view that non-advanced further education, like most other aspects of education, is patchy—it varies from the excellent to the not-so-excellent — I assume that the interests of local education authorities, principals and lecturers are not always the same as the interests of students, and my interest is the students' interest.

Mr. Foster: I accept that explanation from the Secretary of State. He sweeps aside the dedication of those involved in further education—the principals, lecturers and departmental heads.

Sir Keith Joseph *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Foster: The Secretary of State says that his interest in the students is better informed and more dedicated than that of those involved in further education.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Perhaps my hon. Friend can find out whether the Secretary of State now accepts the compromise. Also, why does the Secretary of State feel that students can influence the MSC and so improve the quality of their courses, although there is no real democratic accountability, but that they cannot influence the local education authorities through the locally elected councils?

Mr. Foster: That is a point that I wished to make. Any Secretary of State must want more power to implement change, but to stand on one side and give that power to the MSC, whose structure is unresponsive and insensitive to the forces that have to be persuaded to implement any changes, is not the way to use that power. The Secretary of State may achieve his aims in the short term, but only at the expense of upsetting all those forces within education which he must reconcile to his ideas.

I deal now with the point raised by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold). I have never regarded the MSC as the big black beast which must be resisted at all costs. I welcome the money from the MSC for the youth opportunities programme, because that money can be used as a lever for change within education. I take the same view with regard to the rest of work-related non-advanced education. By all means let us use the money from the MSC as a lever for change, but the Secretary of State for Education should not stand on one side, wash his hands of the matter and say that it is nothing to do with him and that the MSC is in a better position to influence the situation and is better equipped to deal with educational institutions.

Does the Secretary of State accept the compromise being worked out between the education authorities and the MSC under its new chairman? Would he like to tell us whether, in his view, the arrangement is satisfactory?

Sir Keith Joseph *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Foster: The Secretary of State does not wish to tell us at present. I do not regard the MSC as a malevolent influence within the system. Money from the MSC should enable us to implement work-related schemes which will be relevant and responsive to the needs of industry and commerce. However, the MSC is acting in a most insensitive way — a way almost calculated to cause uncertainty and disruption within education. The Secretary of State will regret his abrogation of his responsibility in that respect.

The Secretary of State must wrestle with the problem of the necessity to provide a variety of support for young people in the 16 to 19 age group. Some young people are in receipt of unemployment benefit, some get an allowance from the youth training scheme, some are able

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to use the 21-hour rule, some receive a meagre educational maintenance allowance from the local education authority and some get nothing at all.

There is a great opportunity here. The problem of youth unemployment is horrifying. I have been highly critical of the attitude of the Department of Education and Science to the youth training scheme, and I believe that the Secretary of State himself should have played a much greater part in the discussions.

We can deal with the problem in a constructive way, or we can miss the opportunity to do so. I believe that many of those who gain nothing from school could, between the ages of 16 and 19, be motivated by the youth training scheme to understand the value of education and training. However, the Secretary of State must realise that many young people are dissuaded from staying on at school or embarking on further education because they receive no income support. I am thinking in particular of children from very poor working-class families. That is a great waste.

We must not pretend that the YTS is the best way of catering for the needs of all those students. Very often, it would be better for them to stay on at school or go on to further education. We must find some way of giving those students and their families an incentive to pursue what is for them by far the better course. I would not denigrate the YTS in any way, although it needs to be improved. However, a substantial proportion of young people would be better advised to stay on at school or go on to full-time further education. The Secretary of State ignores the fact that many children from poor families cannot afford to do so.

The Labour party is committed to a comprehensive scheme, lasting at least two years, in which the YTS will be part of an integrated system of further education and training. Staying on at school and in further education will be part of the integrated scheme. Youngsters can enter the youth training scheme, then go back into the education system, and then perhaps proceed to another aspect of education and training during the two-year period. I admit that the scheme would be expensive, but we must work out a way of persuading those for whom it would be best to stay at school or to proceed to full-time further education.

There is a great divide in the House, especially between the Conservative party and the Labour party, about the society that we want. We cannot pretend that politics has no part in education. Politics will always be an integral part of discussions about education, because we are talking about resources and how they should be allocated, how many students should continue in full-time education and what that full-time education should be.

The Secretary of State must understand that he cannot cry for an improvement in standards across the board and then talk as though resources were irrelevant. I recognise that we need more than more resources if we are to improve standards in schools and in further education, but to talk as though resources are irrelevant to that objective is to deceive the electorate. We cannot deliver better standards in education without adequate resources, and in failing to stand up for the education service at Cabinet meetings, and in offering cuts time after time, the Secretary of State has let down the education service and an entire generation of students. If we cannot afford to invest in our young people, we do not believe in the values which we say we uphold.

6.2 pm

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): As I listened to the final comments of the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), I thought that I would be able to agree with what he said. However, I cannot accept his criticism of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The hon. Gentleman will find much agreement for his statement that resources are not irrelevant to the achievement of excellence. The divide between the parties to which he referred does not mean that those of us who believe that resources should be used more efficiently also believe that there is merit in restricting resources. We are aware that, in education as in many other public services, more money could be used wisely and well. However, we are not always certain that the extra money would be used wisely and well.

If we had extra resources for education we might follow the example of our cousins across the Atlantic. In the state of Florida, whose economy is beginning to expand, from September of this year the junior high and high schools will have an extra period in each day's schooling—three quarters of an hour extra schooling. That is a recognition of the fact that there can be a desire for more education, not simply better education within given parameters. In California—another state that has benefited from the growth of the American economy—in September of this year the college semester began a week early. Each semester will be a week longer, which is again a recognition that, in some cases, more education is desirable and can be better.

However, we must remember that in Florida parents pay for the writing materials, stationery and art materials that their children take to school. There is a different participation by parents in Florida in paying the costs of education, and, a much higher proportion of fees is paid by parents and students than happens in Britain. Even if resources were widely available, we would have to examine closely how those increased resources were allocated to ensure that we got the best value.

I shall confine my remarks to the allocation of resources. When it has been debated in the past, it has tended to mean the allocation of resources between those who are directly concerned with teaching in the classroom and those outside. That is an important factor. Even after all that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other Ministers have done, about half of those paid out of the education budget today will never face a classroom full of pupils. There is room for redeployment of resources in the education budget away from those who are not directly concerned with education and towards those who are.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will accept that resources could be better deployed in schools. I was a teacher for many years, and then a head teacher, and I know that a problem in many schools is the growing burden of administrative duties that are carried out by skilled teachers. I hope that we can reverse that trend, because the best teacher—who often obtains promotion to head of department or head teacher because of his skills in the classroom—is not always the best administrator.

We have already heard this afternoon about the current review of teachers' pay and conditions. One of the most revolutionary and desirable changes that could be made

would be to offer a system whereby the excellent teacher was rewarded as a career teacher in the classroom, not by being given an administrative post or by a reduction of his time in the classroom.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House visit schools regularly, and are often shown young pupils doing remarkable work with computers, which I welcome wholeheartedly. However, it is odd that only a few of the schools that have excellent computer programmes for pupils as aids to learning and as training for future careers use computers for their administration. Most schools keep their records on pieces of paper or cardboard in filing cabinets. If the information was recorded electronically so that it could be brought back instantly, it would save an enormous amount of time and effort by teachers who are asked to fill in returns and to make lists of pupils.

There is no need for records to be kept in schools, although that happens all too often. If schools had terminals from a mainframe computer at the education office, it would be unnecessary to ask head teachers to send lists of pupils who met certain criteria, because that information would be available at the touch of a button. The school would not be bothered with such administrative tasks, which all too often fill the time of the most skilled teachers, who would be far better employed teaching in the classroom.

I make it clear that I am not suggesting that education is no more than teaching in the classroom. I recognise that the education budget has to cover a great deal more than that. It has to cover the costs of administration, of building and of providing equipment. I am not belittling these needs. However, one way in which we might achieve the excellence in education that is the object of both sides of the House would be to ensure that the very best teachers were rewarded so that they continued to make their contribution in the classroom during their careers rather than being diverted into an administrative role. If we could achieve that, and ensure that our best pupils were taught by our best teachers, we should also achieve excellence.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman is talking about rewards. From where will the money come?

Mr. Griffiths: I have said that I would like to see increased resources as and when they are available, and out of that I should like to see increased rewards for the best teachers. At the moment, the allocation of funds for salaries is geared to the ability of the nation to pay, as is recognised by the Department of Education and Science, which knows what the allocation is likely to be. I should like teachers to be rewarded within the present totality of salaries for excellence in teaching rather than being promoted into jobs that require them to devote their time to administration. Within the totality of existing salaries, more money going to the best teachers rather than to administrators would be helpful, and as and when greater resources become available I am sure that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and I would wish more resources to be devoted to this.

I agree with much that is implied in the Opposition's motion, but they are taking too narrow and too limited a view. It is necessary for us to recognise that only a small increase in excellence in education can be achieved by increases in resources. What is needed is careful thought and management of the resources, on whatever level they may be provided.

6.12 pm

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): I shall take up several of the points made by the Secretary of State. This is one of the rare occasions when hon. Members who would like to do so can take him on about some of the statements that he regularly makes from the Dispatch Box when he tries to fool the House into believing that expenditure in education is for ever expanding. The only person that the Secretary of State is fooling is himself. Educationists and chief education officers, wherever they are, say that things are getting not better, but worse.

In some authorities, the shortage of the basic resources of education such as books is so critical that teachers have been breaking the law by using machinery illegally to photostat textbooks so that the children can complete courses. This is so serious that writs have been issued against certain local authorities. The teachers are merely attempting to cope with the savage cuts that have been experienced, not only in their salaries but in necessary requirements such as books. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) talked about an extra computer for the school secretary to help with administration. However, in education the need is far more basic than that.

Often, the Secretary of State is tempted to play the numbers game when he talks about pupil-teacher ratios. I shall point out one or two anomalies that show that things are not as simple as the Secretary of State would have the House believe. It is true that there are falling rolls, but it is not simple to match schools with falling rolls to the number of teachers. For example, one cannot say that numbers in a primary school are so low that the school will be closed and the pupils will be concentrated in another primary school four miles away. In many instances, although such a solution may be economic, it will be difficult to close the original primary school because mothers have very young children who cannot travel long distances. For that reason, uneconomic schools may need to be kept open.

The Secretary of State attempts to fool the House with his numbers game, but his theories do not hold water. He should stop playing the game, because it is far from being as honest as we should expect of him. If the Secretary of State wishes confirmation of this theory, I suggest that he initiates an investigation into the problem of schools with falling rolls and trying to staff them with teachers, when schools already have so many problems.

With great pride, the Secretary of State quoted savings from school meals. This is a vexed problem for many local authorities. Making savings in school meals means that local authorities are serving junk food menus, which are no longer nutritional and do not provide a balanced diet for the children. Some authorities, including mine, have high incidences of poverty and in many cases the midday meal at school is the only main meal that the child will have. For this reason, educationists believe that it is essential that a child should have a balanced diet at school. It is not good enough to say that the kids can be provided with food at home so that at lunch time they can have merely a sausage roll or a cheese bun. That is not giving them an adequate meal, even though savings may be made.

I remember that some years ago, under a previous Conservative Government, the Prime Minister was the Secretary of State for Education and Science. She had the

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idea of stopping school milk. My authority was outraged and up in arms about this, because it recognised that school milk was essential and was good for the development of the child, and even good for education. The local authority on that occasion countermanded the order. Instead of breaking the law, we introduced free soup. However, the then Conservative Government were not satisfied and tried to introduce regulations to deny the children their free soup. Talk about cuts being made in the cost of school meals is nothing new. Such efforts to cut costs are a constant nag, because education has become a whipping boy and millions of pounds are always being lopped off its budget.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): The position is even worse than my hon. Friend describes. If a child is given a cheese sandwich, there is at least some nutritional value in it. The cheese contains calories and there are carbohydrates in the bread. But in many schools that I have visited children now go for chips with curry sauce. Some sort of soup is poured over the chips. I really cannot see the nutritional value in such food. Incidentally such a meal costs 50p.—for chips with some sort of soupy, curry-like liquid on them. That is what children are having today.

Mr. Eastham: What my hon. Friend says typifies the true position. Our children are now being served junk food in schools, which cannot be in the interests of good education.

Mr. Dunn: I have been listening with interest to the hon. Gentleman, who talks about the city of Manchester, an area which I know well. I am curious to know why he thinks that the Labour Government, who succeeded the Conservative Government of 1970-74, did not reintroduce the provision of milk in schools.

Mr. Eastham: The Minister does not know Manchester as well as I do. I have lived in Manchester all my life, other than during my national service. When we had the reorganisation of local government in 1974, the Labour-controlled Greater Manchester county council had a licence to spend 2p. Hon. Members will remember that there was a licence for a local authority to spend a certain amount of money. It was decided to spend that money to allow the 10 districts to provide milk. It was done because there were two local authorities that were not Labour but Conservative. The Labour Government told local authorities that they could now supply free milk if they wished to do so. However, the two Conservative authorities in the Greater Manchester area had no intention of reintroducing the provision of milk. As a result the Greater Manchester county council—the upper tier for the 10 authorities—said that it would provide it. Those are the true facts about the provision of school milk.

We talk a great deal about examination results. They are an issue very dear to the Labour party. But it is not unreasonable to point out that many factors are involved in getting good examination results. Children have to live in decent homes. They do not do very well when they live in terrible slums. We have many problems in the inner city areas, where the Government are doing next to nothing to improve housing conditions. If a child has homework to do, it is essential that he goes to a decent home, possibly with central heating, and to a room where he can study.

I realise that the majority of Government supporters do not come from poor homes. They do not appreciate what it is like to live in a slum and consequently they do not understand the importance of other amenities in addition to classrooms. Bad housing is another reason why children in our inner city areas do not achieve very good examination results.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Just now I heard a Government supporter ask about Liverpool. Will my hon. Friend comment on the worth of providing a temporary flower garden, which is about all that this Government have done for Liverpool, when set against the real poverty of opportunity for children in the north-west generally and the real poverty of the backgrounds of these children? However valuable a flower garden might be, it does not solve these problems.

Mr. Eastham: I would never refuse anything from this Government. If they want to provide a few flower gardens, at least they will make life a little more tolerable. However, I do not think that Government supporters should imagine that they will make a devastating contribution to an improvement in standards of education.

We have had numerous reports on education—the Newsom report, the Plowden report and the Robbins report. All of them made one basic point. All of them recognised the need to spend money. Until the Government are honest enough to say that it is necessary to provide money, we shall never achieve the standards of education that the House wants to provide.

There is no shortage of resources in private education. I remember watching a television programme a couple of years ago about some of the posh, fee-paying schools. It was said with a certain amount of pride that even the rowing equipment was worth £250,000. In some of our schools we cannot even afford textbooks. That underlines the dishonesty of the Government. They know these facts but they try to cheek their way through and convince people that they really care. We know that they do not care. Actions are better than words, and we are not getting the necessary resources.

Education is always the whipping boy of Conservative Governments, and no longer does education have its rightful place among the professions. It does not have the prestige to which it is entitled. We have this constant haggling every time the teachers as a profession make representations for decent pay. As time goes on we shall get what we pay for, so we shall have low morale among our teachers and, as a consequence, we shall have steadily reducing standards of education.

In this debate we are discussing two sections—schools and further education—and there is one major problem about our schools which was touched on by one of my hon. Friends earlier today. It refers to maintenance grants and the unequal subsidies. There is a great deal of confusion in all local authorities. In massaging the unemployment figures the Government have decided to spend money on the Manpower Services Commission, and grants are to be paid to young people under its scheme. There are other education answers such as discretionary grants, which the Government tell local authorities they may give if they wish. But if they do they get into difficulties with the Treasury, which says that they are spending too much money. What is more, very often the grants are means-tested, which causes further problems.

Local authorities should not be penalised if they wish to give grants to encourage young people to stay on at school. Sometimes, obviously, school leavers will benefit by staying on in education, but some can do so only if there is some financial benefit for them. Instead, they say to themselves that if they go on the dole they will get unemployment pay so they may as well stay in bed and collect money for doing so. That is no use to anyone. It is of no benefit to the young people concerned and it is of no benefit to the country's future. Other children stay on but their parents receive virtually no assistance. If the Government genuinely wish to give equal opportunities to children, that aspect should be cleared up.

The Secretary of State periodically announces that he intends to impose a curriculum but local authorities are given no clear idea of what is in his mind so they do not know where they are going.

I hope that the Government will also give us some answers about the effect of falling rolls on parental freedom of choice. There is no easy solution. Popular schools are filled to overflowing while pupils rattle against the sides of the other schools. It is time that the Department suggested some logical solution.

The word "privatisation" is constantly wafting around and it seems that there may be some more of it in the offing for education. This naturally causes restlessness in the work force. Staff are entitled to be treated with respect. They are not parasites. Many education authority workers providing school meals and other services do a first-class job, although they are often underpaid. They are entitled to security and to some idea of where they are going. It is all very well to talk about parents' rights, but it should be remembered that teachers and other staff are often parents as well.

In further education there was great resentment when it was discovered that the new money for Manpower Services Commission training was being taken away from education. I remember being told by the Minister that £60 million was being transferred. That was not new money. It was just a bookkeeping exercise, taking money from further education and slinging it into the Manpower Services Commission in an attempt to kid people that the Government were spending more money. There was quite an eruption over this and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities made it clear to the Government that there would be no co-operation. We are now told that there is to be some kind of peace formula. If that is so, may we take it that the Government intend to bring back some kind of sanity into spending in these areas?

The special problems of the polytechnics have not so far been raised in the debate. It is time that the Government applied themselves to problems such as capital allocation. Polytechnics suffer the annual problem of having to replace obsolete equipment. High technology equipment such as computers is very expensive. It is a matter not of a couple of hundred pounds but of several thousands of pounds. If they are to train students for industry they must keep abreast of technical developments, but they are falling far behind in the attempt to kit themselves out with the necessary equipment.

On the subject of training in education, even the Government must admit that not all educationists agree with the Government's new theory that education authorities should be training students for specific jobs. Many of them believe that their business is to provide education for the child's entire future. People tend to change jobs three times in their lifetime, so it is more important to provide a broad education. Moreover, specific requirements are constantly changing. The Select Committee on Employment recently took evidence from industrialists and we found that many of them did not really know what they wanted. For instance, five or six years ago there was a shortage of production management engineers. In the four or five years necessary to produce the necessary specialists, however, developments in robotics meant that many of those trained people were not required. Therefore, we should not be fooled into rushing to provide everything that industrialists say that they need. We should be developing talent so that people can adapt to the changing needs of industry.

The purpose of today's debate is to impress on the Government that excellence in education cannot be achieved on the cheap. Education is an investment for the future and it is vital for this country's survival into the next century.

6.37 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I have no hesitation in supporting the Prime Minister's amendment. For the first time, we have a Secretary of State who has turned his attention to the 40 per cent. of school leavers who, in his own words,

"after 11 years of compulsory schooling, show no apparent benefit from having been at school."

He has also said that to do something about this

"The keys are effective teachers and motivated pupils",

that

"Teaching effectively is a hard job"

—I entirely agree—and that the Government's first job was to raise the quality of teachers.

That is not best achieved by talking of teachers as commodities in a supply and demand situation. As a former teacher, I know that teaching is very much a vocation. There are very few professions of that kind in which the ruling system is that of supply and demand. With falling school rolls, the profession is contracting. Pay is also part of that. There have been enormous fluctuations in pay increases for teachers in the past 10 years or so. This has led to an uncharacteristic militancy on the part of teachers, for whom money has traditionally been a secondary consideration. The Secretary of State, employers and teachers all want to succeed in finding a new structure for future pay arrangements.

The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) spoke wisely on a number of issues. We should all remember that education administrators, and indeed councillors in local education authorities, have a unique propensity for causing deep gloom among teachers, parents and pupils, often to the detriment of their children's education. That is often not intentional, but, perceived from a teacher's point of view, it can be very damping.

The hon. Gentleman pointed out that all the problems of society tend to end up on teachers' plates. That is often true. That is why much more community support is necessary for our schools and teachers. I speak with feeling as a former parent-teachers' association chairman and a former elected parent-governor, but that works both ways, and increased specialisation by teachers, including at primary level, can lead to a freezing out of parents from the educational process — a weakening of that partnership between parents and teachers.

[Mr. Robert Key]

I was in the United States recently looking at education and I was impressed by the fact that the teaching profession there seems to be less jealous and more welcoming of parents into classrooms and the education process. We should bear that in mind.

I congratulate the Secretary of State on his commitment to a change from a relative examination system far nearer to an absolute system in which young people will in future be tested not on how they compare with other young people, but on what they understand, know and can do. Many teachers welcome the concept of criteria-related grades. That step will improve motivation, among both teachers and pupils. Pupils will be tested according to their potential.

The amendment speaks of

"securing the most effective use of the substantial resources available for the benefit of the education service."

Those substantial resources are provided not just for the benefit of the education service but for the benefit of the community, and there is one aspect of that which we neglect at our peril.

I want to concentrate on the need for our young people to be made much more fully aware of the dangers of substance abuse. Today, my regional health authority is considering a report which it commissioned on the rising tide of drug abuse. Like many other hon. Members, I have discussed that matter with local police, the local education authority and the district health authority. In common with everybody else, my education authority has a curriculum for social and personal education in its schools and within that there is a unit on community responsibility for drugs, including alcohol and tobacco. I stress the words "community responsibility" because that is how we should be tackling the problem, particularly in schools. However, my education authority confines that curriculum to the fourth and fifth years, and I am not convinced that that is adequate.

There seems to be agreement that because of trends in the availability and price of marijuana and cocaine, because there are doubts about the efficiency of the voluntary code for retail sales of solvents such as glue and butane, and because there is no sign of a downturn in the consumption of alcohol, its social acceptability and its use and misuse, we probably have about two years before we shall have to face major problems of chemical dependency among our young people.

I welcome the Government's initiative on drug abuse and the work of the ministerial committee responsible for co-ordinating Government action in that area, but are my right hon. Friend and his Department represented on that committee? The Government must take a long-term and broad view and the solution of the problems of substance abuse must start with education.

I had so many questions in my mind about the issue of substance abuse that I went to California last month with the prime purpose of examining prevention and rehabilitation projects. I found that some 60 per cent. of high school children have had experience of marijuana or cocaine, or both. There is no easy transfer of solutions. It cannot even be said that a similar situation will arise here, but we ignore California's experience and conclusions at our peril.

It is often said that to talk about drugs and substance abuse in schools encourages experimentation and their use and abuse among young people. The best evidence suggests that that is not so. When perhaps it is so, it is the result of general comment in general studies in schools, probably by a teacher with the best of intentions who is not supported by a rigorous curriculum in the school or education authority. There is also a body of evidence which suggests that education on alcohol, drugs, tobacco and solvents should begin when a child is as young as eight years old. Later, it may be too late.

Two of the most experienced teams in the United States have produced programmes which I commend to my right hon. Friend. Many San Francisco schools have widely adopted a sophisticated model chemical policy which is designed to institute clear chemical abuse prevention programmes within their schools. It stresses the inter-relation of student, family and community and the importance of teacher training.

The Centre for Human Development in Lafayette, California, has developed a programme which has been widely used and proven throughout schools in the United States. It involves a mutual support network for teenagers with alcohol and drug problems, known as NEAT family groups. NEAT stands for "new experience in affection and trust". That is an untranslatable Californian expression of the need for young people to become more confident in their ability to succeed in school, in their relationships and in life in general.

The Department of Education and Science is to be congratulated on the careful advice that it has given to local education authorities on drugs and drug-related problems, but the time has come when we can no longer rely exclusively on circulars from Elizabeth house to prevent the waste of human resources—people—and the family tragedies which result from all forms of chemical substance abuse, whether we are talking of tobacco, alcohol, solvents or drugs.

I draw two conclusions. First, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his Department should play a full part in the co-ordination of the Government's drug abuse policy. Secondly, education authorities should take a lead in establishing community-based school-centred groups to act on local problems. The local education authority is too big a unit. The problems of Swindon are different from those of Salisbury, and those of Trowbridge are different from those of Amesbury. The headmaster of the Stonehenge comprehensive school in Amesbury told me on Monday of problems there relating to the Stonehenge festival, the spectacle of drug availability and the wholesale disregard for the law which inevitably goes right through into the school and community.

If such community-based groups could be established, membership should undoubtedly include not only teachers and parents, but doctors, police, social workers and local churchmen. As I am sure hon. Members will agree, substance abuse occurs among schoolchildren, but often after school hours and off school premises. It is a community phenomenon.

It is still true that prevention is better than cure. Cure and rehabilitation is another area of great deficiency in Britain, but it would be inappropriate for me to talk about that now. We cannot afford to be complacent about substance abuse in our schools. Many problems face education, but that is one which we can prevent from becoming worse while the situation is under control. For once we can avoid lurching into management by crisis of a major social threat if we all have the will to act now.

6.49 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I was very interested in the remarks of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), which dwelt on a very serious problem. I had great sympathy with almost all of his speech. However, he also said that he would congratulate the Department of Education and Science and I cannot go along with him on that. Although it may perceive the problem, it has not done enough about it. It is one thing to send out circulars saying that something should be done about glue sniffing, but there are also possibilities for action. Legislation could be introduced making it impossible for young children to buy glues and various chemicals. Certainly more could be done in that way.

I urge the Department to look again at the problem. After all, it is a serious problem and has existed for 50 or 60 years in the United States. I believe that in large measure it arises because of the uncertain future facing many young American children. That problem is now coming home to roost in Britain. One cause—although perhaps not the major cause—may be that children go to school, not because they will eventually go on to higher education or vocational training, or because they will then obtain jobs, but simply because there is nowhere else to go. Their parents want to get rid of them between 9 am and 4 pm. When they finish school, they will have no future and will be thrown on to the scrap-heap.

There are various schemes, such as the youth training scheme, which are intended to give children the impression that there is a future, but children are not that daft. They know that the schemes last for a year and that after that they have to find a job. But they cannot find jobs and they know what their older peers are doing. Consequently, there is a lowering of morale. Children do not know what to do, and that is one of the factors that make many of them go to places in which they can sniff glue and other substances.

Although that is an important subject, I want to talk about higher education and the curricula——

Mr. Hind: If the hon. Gentleman had been in the Chamber from the beginning of the debate, instead of being wheeled in to waste our time, he would know that the debate is about schools and further education.

Dr. Marek: Higher education is contained in further education.

Mr. Matthew Parris (Derbyshire, West): Perhaps I can assist the hon. Gentleman. Although the debate is on further education in schools, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State dwelt, without apology and at length, on the grant cuts that have arisen from the autumn statement. Many of us would like the opportunity of speaking on that subject as well.

Dr. Marek: I think that this is a wide-ranging debate. I have read the motion and the amendment, and I think that I am in order. I hope that Conservative Members will make interventions, but that they will be interventions of substance and of logical argument and that they will not raise mere peccadilloes as to whether one is using the right terminology.

I shall concentrate on what happens to schoolchildren and on what is taught in schools and in courses of higher education. I was a lecturer at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, for nearly 20 years and, although I have not seen the report, I have it on good authority that this year the principal of that college said that some students do not now find places and that the situation is the worst since the last war. I stress that a principal and an eminently respected figure in the community has said that the situation is the worst since the last war.

It is not good enough for Conservative Members to give facile excuses about the problem being simply a question of a little more efficiency or economy, and I do not expect them to say that if only students were shunted from one institution to another everything would be all right, or that students numbers have increased, and so on. That principal understands the position, and he says that the situation in his university college is the worst since the last war.

There was a time when universities had quinquennial planning and were able to plan five years in advance. Such systems are efficient. If institutions, colleges and schools know what their resources are to be, they can plan for their starting numbers. They can also make projections about students numbers and plan efficiently. To be fair, the previous Labour Government must to a certain extent take responsibility, but what happened then is as nothing compared with what is happening now under a Conservative Government.

The rate support grant figures are often changed, and consequently local authorities are under pressure because they do not know from one year to the next what their financial obligations will be, or how much money they will have at their disposal in order to provide for the education services in their areas.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): My hon. Friend will be well aware that a bombshell has fallen on another section of further education and training with the announcement that the information technology centres' programme, which was supposed to be the jewel in the crown of the new training system, is to be cut. The Department of Trade and Industry will not top it up after this year. That is a cruel blow to what was supposed to be the jewel in the crown of a new sort of training for young people.

Dr. Marek: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that valid point. It might be carrying it too far to say that the Government should be interested in education above everything else, but they should see education as a vital and necessary function of government if they are to provide for succeeding generations. Unfortunately, the Government put their medium-term financial strategy at the top of the list and are concerned with reducing public borrowing as far as possible. They do not like public expenditure, and it does not matter one whit whether generation after generation of schoolchildren are ruined, because the Government are not interested in that They are concerned only with reducing public expenditure or the public sector borrowing requirement to, say, 1 per cent. of gross domestic product by some future date. That is a great pity.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that the summation of the situation is that if the state has to provide it will cut that provision back to the minimum? The Government seem to believe in the policy that if one can afford it one can have it, and that if one cannot afford it one will not get it.

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend is quite right. One has only to look at the figures for assisted places and private education to see that that point is proved. The Government are against public expenditure. The Department has even produced various figures for students entering colleges and universities, but they are quite unrealistic. Some of those figures have had to be changed. The DES "Report on Education 100" brought the figures up a little, but suffice it to say that the University Grants Committee does not believe in the X or Y variants for projected student numbers. It is all part of the Government's grand design to reduce public expenditure. Meanwhile, education suffers.

I support education as an end in itself. I support the notion that anyone—whether a school child, student, worker or pensioner—should be able to avail himself of education if he can benefit from it in any way. It is the Government's duty to provide a system of education in which that can be achieved.

I want to ask the Secretary of State a question, but unfortunately I think I know his answer. I have heard him say different things during Question Time on education, but everyone has a chance to redeem himself. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that education should be available to all who can benefit from it? If he does not, why not? Surely the nation's wealth is in the generation that is growing up. We shall pay dearly if we waste talents.

The Clwyd county council is going through its budgetary exercise. Class sizes in the county are among the largest in Wales, but the council plans to cut the number of secondary school teachers by at least 122. That is planned so that the grant holdback provisions will not be too onerous. It is a substantial cut that is proposed by the officers. If they had decided to produce a budget with no holdback, many more teachers would be involved than the proposed five or six in each comprehensive school.

One headmaster has written to the parents of each of his pupils. He said:

"Quite simply it will mean that the school will not be able to provide the depth and variety of education that is the right of every child in the country. To be more specific: the 'O' level and CSE groups in Welsh, French and Religious Education will have to be combined. Examinations groups in Physics and Child Care will disappear."

It is deplorable that an important subject such as physics will disappear. Certain computer studies and design groups will also disappear if the cuts take place.

The letter continued:

"German, Modular Technology, Pottery and Domestic Science are all at risk. All classes will have increased numbers."

The school concerned is Ysgol Bryn Alyn. It says something that a headmaster feels so strongly about what is happening to his school and the provisions for it that he has to write such a circular letter to every parent.

I find the situation deplorable. If the Government have any sense, and if they care about the wealth of the country and the generations to come, they will do something quickly.

The Teacher of 28 September 1984 says that half the schools studies in a survey used the help of unpaid parents to undertake essential school work. That cannot be right. If we want a proper education system we must pay for it. I am not saying that we are squandering money, but education costs money and needs investment. Eventually we shall be repaid, because we shall produce a civilised and educated population to create the wealth that we need.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My hon. Friend referred to parental help in schools. In which type school and in which areas do we expect the most help from parents? Does not the need for such help emphasise the divisions in our education system?

Dr. Marek: That is a valid point. I do not like the terms "middle class", "working class" or "ruling class", but the middle classes can afford to provide the textbooks and "minding" duties at certain times. They can afford to provide the little extras. In working-class schools, where there is the greatest deprivation, such extra help cannot be provided. Parents have no incentive because they know that even when their children are educated there will be no jobs for them.

Yesterday the Clwyd education committee voted not to implement cuts, but to go for a standstill budget for next year. That has to be ratified by the full council, but if a standstill budget is agreed and I were to ask the Secretary of State for Wales what he thought of that he would say that he would have seriously to consider rate-capping Clwyd county council next year. That is deplorable. We should try to unscramble the mix so that we can provide an education system which our people deserve and from which they can benefit.

In recent months steps have been taken to try to decrease the term of the standard three-year degree course to two years. There are arguments for doing that. Education is a life-long process and some people want to spend one or two years in further education before gaining vocational experience and then going back to education. I see the argument against the standard, rigid three-year pattern.

I suspect that the Government are trying to make the change because of their overriding desire to cut public expenditure. I hope that the Minister can reassure me. I hope that if changes are made it will be because of the desire to improve the balance and increase the mix of courses to allow different students to complete their education in the way that they wish. That is important to the development of education.

The two-year course for the diploma of higher education, introduced as a result of the James report in 1972, required two A-levels for entry. It was not a success and was abandoned because it was thought to be second-rate. I do not want the Government to pile on the agony by trying to make the majority of students enrol for second-rate education courses.

Three years are necessary for most courses. Students need a year to get used to higher education, which is different from that which they receive in school. Then they need a second year to digest the education. Only in the third year do they see the design of the course and the education system. Three years is particularly necessary for engineering courses. Some people are pressing for a four-year engineering course. Vocational courses often last five or six years. A law course at university takes only three years, but students have to continue studying beyond that. Medical courses also take longer than three years.

I hope that the Secretary of State will resist his Treasury taskmasters when they ask him to squeeze another £100 million out of the higher education budget. I hope that he will say, "No. So far, but no further." We must have a higher education system of which we can be proud and

which will produce engineers, doctors, professionals and, more than that, a better-educated and therefore wealthier and more civilised nation.

I wish briefly to discuss course content. There have been little babblings from the Department about what should or should not be taught in our schools. What we teach, how we teach it and when we teach it is important to educational development. The Secretary of State complained bitterly about the content of the sociology course at the Open University. He said that economists had told him that it was wrong. Of course, those economists are his own paid lackeys. The right hon. Gentleman has instilled changes into the course. He should be careful about doing that, because extremism in both directions —Fascist and Stalinist—starts from such actions.

We know what happened in Germany before the second world war, and we know what is happening in Russia today. It tells its teachers that they must teach Marxism. If I told Conservative Members that our schools must teach Marxism between the hours of 9 am and 10 am every Monday and Wednesday, they would howl me down with screams of protest. The Fascist ideas in Germany resulted from the abandonment of consensus on what should be in a core curriculum. The Secretary of State said that our schools should teach history. He said that we should be proud of our past. If that is taken too far, it could lead to sad results.

I know of one or two actions of which I, as a British subject, am not very proud. I wonder whether anyone is proud of what we did as a nation in the opium wars in China. I wonder whether that is taught in our schools. It should be, because it is part of our history.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should be proud of the fact that we are able to learn from our history? We do not have distorted history. It is important to teach that history and to learn from it.

Dr. Marek: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. However, there should be a balance of all types of history. I shall give a few more examples—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, no."] Oh, yes. Conservative Members have been taught about the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo, about the capture of the Falkland Islands and the turfing out of the Argentinian Governor 200 years ago. There is more to our history than that. I am making a serious point about the development of education. It is central to the motion and the amendment.

What about the treatment of conscientious objectors in world war 1? We are now beginning to learn of the Fascist and racist attitudes of the ruling classes during the 1920s and 1930s. We may have to wait for a few more decades before all is known.

We cannot be proud of what we have done in India. We used the Indian Army to police the whole of the Empire. That was paid for by the taxpayers of India. We destroyed India's textile industry. How could we be proud of the Amritsar massacre? Is that taught in our schools? What about the secret treaty of London in 1915 to bring Italy into the war? I wonder how many children are taught about that. There was our appalling intervention in Russia in 1918—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Paul Dean): Order. This is interesting history, but I am finding it a little difficult to relate the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the motion before us.

Dr. Marek: My remarks are central to the motion, because I am referring to educational development. It was the Secretary of State who said that we should teach history in a certain way. I must mention Ireland, our non-action after the potato blight, the highland clearances and the use of torture since 1945 in Northern Ireland, Kenya, Palestine and Cyprus. Of course, there are good parts to our history. My point is that we should allow our schools the freedom to teach. There should be no interference by the Secretary of State. This country has always believed in religious freedom, free speech and political freedom. We should also have the freedom to educate according to the wishes of our community.

Of course, I accept that there is an argument for a core curriculum. Everyone should learn certain things. No one would dispute that everyone should be numerate and able to multiply nine by seven and come up with 63. However, at a higher level of education there may be some argument about what should be taught. Some people may say that in the first year of university a mathematician should know how to solve linear differential equations with constant co-efficients. If there is a general consensus that something should be taught, it should be considered for inclusion in the core curriculum. However, if a body of opinion believes that something should not be taught, the Government should not impose that core curriculum against its wishes, because that would be to embark upon extremism. No nation can walk the road to righteousness without any guilt. Everybody feels guilt. Nothing is white and nothing is black.

I hope that the Secretary of State will consider the two major points that I have made in my speech. Irrespective of what the right hon. Gentleman says, local government does not have the facilities to provide a proper education system. Any of my hon. Friends could give countless examples of that—deprivation, not sufficient textbooks, bad school meals, not sufficient equipment and recreational equipment, not sufficient teachers and not sufficient subject possibilities.

One of the major causes of the problem is that, although the Government say that it is for the county councils to determine their priorities, we all know that the county councils have no fat left on them and that their financial priorities are limited. They have a difficult job to do if they are to provide any sort of moderate education provision. Will the Secretary of State stand up for education and ask for some education expenditure to be closed as disregarded expenditure? That would be a step in the right direction. I suggest that he goes to the Treasury to hear what it says. It will say no, of course, but we would judge him by the progress that he made in that fight.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will take into account the comments that I have made on a core curriculum. If we are to impose a core curriculum with the aim of furthering education development, it can be introduced only if there is consensus among the community at large that it is the right thing to do. That will be necessary wherever it is introduced and at whatever level.

7.21 pm

Mr. Matthew Parris (Derbyshire, West): I mean no disrespect to Opposition Members who know that they have spoken at great length, who have never been less than engaging and who for all I know are experts on the subjects on which they speak, when I say that Conservative Members know as well as they do what it is like to try to sneak across the lobby only to feel the heavy hand of a Whip on their shoulder. The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) must feel a sense of great bitterness when he considers the immense contribution that his once great party has made to education and at the same time surveys the empty green Benches behind him.

Mr. Sayeed: This is the first Opposition Supply day of the Session and one would expect Opposition Members to talk about a subject which concerns them passionately. The degree of passion which they feel for education is revealed by the presence now of only six Labour Back Benchers. There have been no more than four, five or six throughout the debate.

Mr. Parris: I agree with my hon. Friend but I shall not pursue that line. I am the last person to attempt a tour d'horizon of education——

Mr. Pawsey: May I gently draw my hon. Friend's attention to the few Labour Members present in the Chamber and to the lack of alliance Members? My hon. Friend might care to speculate on the whereabouts of Social Democratic party and Liberal party Members. These are matters that perhaps my hon. Friend should refer to and we look forward with interest to what he has to say.

Mr. Parris: I shall resist the temptation to do so and I shall speculate no further.

I planned to say a good deal on primary and secondary schooling, but almost all of it has already been said by my right hon. and hon. Friends and so I shall not repeat it. I am restrained from launching into that subject by the immensely kind and courteous way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, received a small delegation from my constituency earlier this week to talk about the proposed closure of Hazelwood school. I shall say no more on that subject beyond venturing to him the thought that a county council which is about to spend £50,000 on recalling all school stationery to have it overprinted with "Derbyshire supports nuclear-free zones" might find it in its heart to keep going a smashing little school. I very much hope that my hon. Friend will come to the same conclusion.

The debate earlier in the Session on higher education preceded the autumn statement and a number of contributors to the debate have referred to the increases in parental contributions for which the autumn statement has paved the way. I hope that, as a vice-president of London Conservative students, I shall be forgiven for saying a few words about the increases.

I do not pretend that the levels of student grants or parental contributions are the most important subjects in further or higher education. The most important element is the maintenance of our institutions and the improvement of the quality of teaching within them.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in the area which he represents the issue of student travel grants is of considerable importance because of the distances that students have to travel outside the Matlock area? The hon. Gentleman will be aware that I know the area fairly well. Perhaps he will agree with me that the cost of travelling to college in Derby, Sheffield or surrounding areas, where specialist facilities are available, is of importance to students in the area.

Mr. Parris: The hon. Gentleman interrupted my flow. In common with many other hon. Members, I intended to lay the ground, by a statement that I did not suppose that what I had chosen to speak about could be considered the most important matter in the world, for an explanation that I considered my chosen topic to be rather important. I accept that the levels of student grants and parental contributions must always take second place to maintaining the institutions and the teaching within them, but that has become precisely the problem for students and their parents.

When, as now, there is a shortage of resources, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has to take difficult decisions in deciding where the resources should go, when he has to choose between maintaining the level of the student grant and keeping parental contributions at the current level, and when he has to consider cutting into the resources allocated to the institutions themselves, he must make his decision, as he has on the basis that the most important consideration is the maintenance of the institutions, and that that must be done sometimes at the expense of the level of student grants. He has made the right decision.

That has been done year after year, and every year we have snipped a little more around the edges of the living standards of students and around the edges of the provision that we make available to help parents to maintain their children at college and at university. That snipping has continued over the years and it has been felt every year that there are more important things on which to spend the money than student grants and parental contributions. That will be the position every year, but the result of the snipping is that the real value of student grants has fallen steadily and the assistance that the state is able to give parents has similarly fallen. We are approaching the stage at which many students and parents will find themselves in genuine difficulties.

The changes unveiled in the autumn statement of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer mean that parents with an income of £13,000 will have to pay an extra £79 a year—an extra 10 per cent. on their previous year's contribution. Parents with an income of £18,000 will have to pay an extra £333, or 26 per cent. more than they did in the previous year. Those with an income of £20,000 to £22,000 will have to find an extra £725, or 46 per cent. more.

These increases will make life very difficult for students. They face difficulties when their parents are unwilling or unable to pay their full share of the contribution. There are difficulties for students who have to maintain themselves even on the full grant because its real value has fallen by about 16 per cent. since the grants were set and instituted in 1962. The real value has declined in London by 32 per cent. All these factors make life increasingly difficult for students in higher education.

I accept that my right hon. Friend has made the only decision open to him. I accept also that when resources are scarce the institutions and the quality of teaching within them must be protected almost at all costs. However, I

hope that my right hon. Friend understands that student grants have been cut by about as much as students are able to stand and that parental contributions will have to be increased accordingly. That will be a sharp and cruel blow to many parents. It would not be fair to go very much further along the road that the Government and previous Governments have been following.

7.29 pm

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): I began my teaching career in those expansionist and exciting years under the Administration presided over by the present Earl of Stockton, whose maiden speech in another place yesterday I much appreciated hearing. The early 1960s were a challenging period in which to begin teaching. It was a time of great optimism, when bringing the advantages of further and higher education to many more young people was seen as not only a major opportunity but a necessity. As a teacher starting then, I had the pick of any job. There had been the beginnings of the expansion of higher education during the Macmillan years, but there were too few teachers for the jobs available. It was a time when we saw ahead falling rolls, eventually bringing smaller classes with all the benefits that they mean in education.

The spirit of optimism then, when as a new entrant to the profession I was perhaps more enthusiastic than I became later, contrasts to some extent with the times in which we live today. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. Hughes), who talked about the collapse of morale, but one must recognise that there is low morale today in many school staff rooms. It must be recognised also that, in many classrooms, young people look to the prospect of obtaining employment with increasing pessimism, and we must not ignore that aspect.

There is much that is positive in the contemporary education scene. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has brought to his office a candour and an intellectual honesty that has rightly challenged many of the practices that became accepted in the 1970s and that are now widely regarded as having led to much that is second-rate. As we have been clearly reminded more than once today, my right hon. Friend has presided over a period during which pupil numbers have fallen more than teacher numbers, so that at 17·8 pupils per teacher we have the best pupil-teacher ratio ever.

Expecting that there would be more Opposition Members present, I wrote that no amount of mocking from the Opposition can deny that fact—but there is no one there to mock. The best we heard came from the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), who condemned the Governments of the 19th century. We are now in the 1980s, and if the hon. Gentleman had had much to say that he felt would condemn the Government's policies, I am sure that he would have said it.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: It seems that the hon. Member is not looking carefully around the Chamber. If he does, he will find that there are almost as many Opposition Members present as Conservative Members. If the hon. Gentleman is so worried about the improvement in pupil-teacher ratios, is he satisfied with the fact that more than 1,250,000 children are taught in classes of more than 30 students and more than 170,000 children are taught in classes of more than 40 students?

Mr. Carttiss: I do not think that anyone would be satisfied with anything in education that does not represent the ideal that Rousseau saw as acceptable. We must live in the real world, where the parents of those children must pay taxes and rates and are already finding that burden too heavy.

The view that more money will mean better standards comes across the whole time. What goes on in our schools depends less on finance and more on personnel—the teachers. One of the disadvantages in the great expansion of teacher training places in the 1960s was that some entrants were inadequately prepared and were not motivated for the profession. I welcome the commitment of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the need for a regular appraisal of teachers' performance. He has rightly emphasised that there is an absolute requirement for that.

Except during the probationary year that so many of us went through when we entered teaching in the 1960s, we were never examined for competence in the classroom. We were never required to submit ourselves to objective assessment.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the hon. Gentleman define what he means by "objective assessment"? Who is to conduct those systems of appraisal of teachers in the classroom?

Mr. Carttiss: The profession has often sought to exercise its ability to judge the quality of its members, and there would be considerable encouragement of that aim. The teaching profession has sought to establish itself—I have been a member of it and have sought to back its campaign—to obtain the sort of competence that would be judged acceptable by those fellows who are successful in the profession. Teachers in the classroom know very well the colleagues who are incompetent and those who are able and whose example they wish to follow. There is no difficulty in the Secretary of State introducing a method of objective assessment so that colleagues in the profession and the advisory service—in many parts of the country that service is highly skilled—have an opportunity to see people at work in the classroom more regularly than has been the case.

Mr. Sayeed: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is already an objective assessment of how schools are going—the HMIs' assessment? If it is possible to assess objectively what the schools are doing, it is, therefore, possible to assess objectively the performance of teachers, and that is already being done by professionals.

Mr. Carttiss: There is merit in my hon. Friend's observations, but I do not share his view that the inspectorate is necessarily the right body to perform that task. One would not necessarily see the HMI report on Norfolk as an example of everyday factual experience of teaching in ordinary situations, from which HMIs sometimes seem to be distant. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is carefully considering that aspect. I hope that colleagues in the teaching profession will recognise that nothing but good for their status and the regard in which they are held in the community can come from a method of objective assessment. Many teachers are undertaking objective assessment now. I talked about people entering the teaching profession in the 1960s when I started, and how they were not assessed more than once

[Mr. Carttiss]

in the one year of their probationary service. The fact is that many of those teachers have gone on to take Open University courses. They have taken on part-time degree courses at their local university. Within the profession, a large body of people have already sought to improve and extend their qualifications and expertise. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), who left the Chamber a few moments ago, and the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) were right to speak highly of the majority of teachers.

Between 1971 and 1981, the population in Norfolk increased by 70,000. Proportionately, that is a larger and faster growth than most other counties have experienced. It represents a faster growth than for the nation as a whole. Although recently there has been an increase in the birth rate, that population growth comes mainly from people moving from other parts of the country — often, it seems, from those parts of the country administered by profligate and high-spending Labour-controlled authorities. Although we experience the problem of falling rolls in some parts of the county, schools are overcrowded in others.

The HMI report on national trends published in 1982 expressed anxiety about resource provision in four local authorities in particular. That led to Norfolk being condemned as one of four local education authorities at the bottom of the league. The then chief inspector and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have emphasised that that did not refer to performance, but it led the county council to ask the HMI to make a general survey of four specific areas of the county. The report gained national attention at the beginning of this month and prompted a letter in *The Guardian* from the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), most of which I agree with.

Although I have had some doubts about the practical day-to-day teaching experience of HMIs generally, to which I have already referred, on the whole I should not wish to denigrate the value of their report about Norfolk, nor would I dispute most of their conclusions.

The education committee of which I have been a member for 17 years cannot escape its share of responsibility for some of the criticisms in the report levelled at the lack of resources. The county council, rightly in my view, has consistently sought, year by year, to limit its expenditure. It has been economical since the distinguished Labour Secretary of State for the Environment, Tony Crosland, said, "The party is over," in reference, all those years ago, to the need to restrain local government spending.

Norfolk's net expenditure on education for 1983-84 was £104·8 million. That was almost equivalent to the assessment of grant-related expenditure on education for rate support grant purposes. If the county council budgets at the same level—allowing for inflation—to provide for the same requirements next year as it financed last year, in Norfolk we shall be running into penalty. I ask my right hon. Friend to draw to the attention of the Secretary of State for the Environment the need to look again at the way he and his Department have been dealing with the consistently low-spending local authorities in East Anglia, because the major part of county council expenditure is on education, and that is where we cannot contemplate more reductions.

Norfolk has already gone on the long road towards rationalising and economising in the provision of school dinners. I can never understand why people become upset about children choosing chips and gravy. I suspect that only about one child out of 200 in any school goes for that abomination. Most children have their pocket money and buy what they want. Those who are entitled to a free school meal have it to the value of 50p and they do not have to spend that on chips and gravy; they can spend it on a piece of meat and plenty of salad. I reject the view that we should not be studying means of economising on our school meals service to enable money to be spent on school books and equipment and to provide teachers. That is something that Norfolk has done.

Dr. Marek: I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman could find anywhere in the country where he could have chips and meat for 50p. If the children have 50p, I am sorry to say that it is chips and gravy for many of them.

Mr. Carttiss: I have had the privilege this morning of showing around the House 40 young people from a middle school in my constituency. I should be delighted for the hon. Gentleman to have lunch with me there. For 50p plus VAT for adults, he will find that he can have chips and a piece of meat at the West Flegg middle school, Martham, as I know.

Mr. Bermingham *rose*——

Mr. Carttiss: Many of us in Norfolk took a long time to be convinced that bringing in a comprehensive school system would achieve improvements in the quality of education. Some of the problems identified in the HMI report relate to anxieties that some of us had about comprehensive schools generally. I do not regret the fact that reorganisation came about eventually, but at a pace that we thought was right. Incidentally, the legislation put through the House by the then Socialist Administration, denying local authorities the right to determine their own system of education, represented then a major infringement of local powers that makes the current cries from the Opposition Benches about rate capping hypocritical in the extreme.

Our unwillingness in Norfolk from 1974 to 1978 to abolish our grammar schools led to the then Labour Administration declining to approve various capital expenditure schemes unless they led directly to a comprehensive school system.

The anxieties to which I have referred are not unfamiliar and are related to the possibility that

"Much of the work of secondary school pupils would be geared towards those of average ability."

That was the anxiety that we felt about comprehensive education. That is one of the judgments on some of the schools in Norfolk today that we read in the HMI report. It also says that it

"is a problem by no means confined to schools inspected in Norfolk."

We must support and encourage the teachers, and I believe that hon. Members are interested in and keen to give teachers the praise that they rightly deserve for the enormous amount of time that they give up during their lunch hours and evenings. It is a pity that some of their leaders in the professional associations, which have now affiliated to the TUC and see themselves more as industrial bodies than professional organisations, do not show the same recognition of that dedication to duty. That is not a question of spending policies.

There is more that I wish to say but, in contrast to the hon. Member for Wrexham, I know that several other Conservative Members are anxious to contribute to the debate. I welcome my right hon. Friend's initiative on the curriculum. It needs to be broadly based, relevant and balanced. I was interested in the comments about ensuring that everyone knows all about the opium wars. I thought that the modern trend in the so-called progressive element was towards peace studies—to show everyone how, by throwing down our arms, we would ensure peace. That was the mistake that the Chinese made in 1840-41.

The Secretary of State has spoken about the common ground that exists in the House. Notwithstanding the remarks that I have happily provoked from the Opposition Benches, which earlier had seemed dead, I believe that there is common ground between us. I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has shown his ability to agree in some measure with some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Durham, North.

There is much more to be said, but I believe that the Government's current education policies can be backed with complete confidence. However, while more money does not mean, ipso facto, better education, we need to recognise that less money will not produce a higher quality of education.

7.50 pm

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): To a great extent this debate has dealt with English matters, but it would be wise to remind ourselves of several universal truths.

I should like to ask the Tory party several questions. I have been stimulated to do so by the extraordinary speech by the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss). I sometimes wonder who on earth teaches the members of the Tory party. There must be a special little school producing those extraordinary philosophies and ideas—from chips with gravy to chips with everything. I do not think that anyone will disagree when I say that this is the most mean-minded and philistine Government that Britain has suffered since the 17th century. Charles I was not bad but this Government——

Dr. Godman: My hon. Friend is being too harsh on the English.

Mr. Buchan: Of course, Charles I was Scots, but he had particular problems.

This most mean-minded and philistine Government have a hatred of learning. I should like to examine what has been done by them and by the Secretary of State. I should like to remind hon. Members of the wise words of Marghanita Laski, who wondered what on earth would be the response if we had no libraries, but someone, for example in the Greater London council or the House, stood up and said that he had a good idea, stating, "Let us put up a building, four walls and a roof, put shelves in it and books on the shelves, and let people borrow the books free of charge." Imagine the reception that that idea would get from Conservative Members, who would see it as another phenomenon of Red Ken, and as the Left paying out more public money. Victorian philanthropy introduced libraries, and it is several degrees more progressive than the present Tory party. It is extraordinary, but that is precisely what would happen.

What worries me are statements about books by the Minister for the Arts, Lord Gowrie, who is also responsible for libraries. He made an extraordinary speech when opening a library — one of the products of Victorian philanthropy that Tory Members seem to hate so much—deploring the fact that not enough was being charged. He recommended the library to charge for every possible service related to it. He recommended that where it was legal for the library to make charges it should do so, because, if a charge was made, the user would appreciate what he or she was getting. It is an extraordinary philosophy that when a charge is made the user will appreciate what she or he is getting. There is only one profession of which that would be a proper description —prostitution. The prerogative of the harlot through the ages has now become the philosophy of the Government.

The Tory party is the party of gentlemen. The definition of a Tory gentleman is someone who develops a life of enhanced leisure. The Tories are making sure that plenty of leisure is given to people. There is leisure for the unemployed, but they will not let it be enhanced leisure.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Did my hon. Friend notice that the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) admitted that he thought that the Government should spend more, so he pleaded guilty to the charge that there was a lack of books, to which the school inspectors' report drew special attention?

Mr. Buchan: It is true not only of the hon. Gentleman's area in Norfolk but——

Mr. Spearing: But of Oxford too.

Mr. Buchan: Nothing is sacred from the juggernaut of the philistines in the Tory party, not even Oxford.

Another sinister development is the proposition that is going around in the Treasury to extend value added tax to books and publications. It is no use saying that the Government would not do anything as monstrous as that. They have been capable of it. For example, they have already extended VAT to takeaway food. There are only about three more areas left into which VAT can be extended. The first is children's clothes, the second is food, in addition to hot takeaway food, and the third is books and publications. Clearly, the Government do not want to arouse the anger of mothers by putting VAT on children's clothes. They do not want to face the contumely that would come with the extension of VAT to all foods. They had enough trouble with Chinese takeaways. That leaves books and publications. We know that their beady eye is fixed upon them.

That has never been repudiated. We have tabled question after question asking the Government to state publicly that they will no longer consider the proposition of putting VAT on books. They have carefully avoided doing any such thing. I should like to remind Tory Members that that proposition was last put forward, in August 1940 by Kingsley Wood, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer. That was the time when Churchill was exhorting us to fight on the beaches, but the Government were saying, "Let us put a tax on books." What happened? The whole House of Commons, including A.P. Herbert, said, "We are fighting for the things that matter. We are fighting for values. We shall not put a tax on books despite the difficulty that this country is in." In the height of that crisis in the summer of 1940 that proposition was rejected by the House not only with contempt but in a gale of laughter. That imposition of VAT would have had to apply

[Mr. Buchan]

to all books, including the Bible and, as A.P.Herbert said, it would have been the first time in history that the word of God had been taxed.

But the Tory party is prepared to do that. It says, "Shakespeare—poof. The Bible—poof. Let us get the money in." That is what the Tories' concept is. They say that if it is good to make a charge, it is even better if one can add 15 per cent. to it. Thus VAT becomes a sort of good so that the customer will appreciate books all the more. If he appreciates being charged, he will appreciate it more if 15 per cent. more is added to it. I hope that before the night is out the Minister will tell us that the Government will not go ahead with the noxious proposition of putting a tax on books.

Mr. Powley: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman is saying. I am not privy to any information as to what the Treasury might do in the next Budget, but is he aware that books and publications are subject to tax on the continent, in many European countries? Will he apply his mind to the thinking behind the actions of Socialist countries in the EEC that put a tax on books, periodicals and so on?

Mr. Buchan: I cannot think of any Socialist Government who initiated a tax on books, but the hon. Gentleman is right in saying that almost every country in Europe imposes a tax on books. That is precisely why we are worried. Tory Members want harmonisation of taxation. Furthermore, as costs are rising and as the ludicrous common agricultural policy continues, there is a growing demand for a bigger return from VAT. The Government have already increased by 40 per cent. this year the 1 per cent. on own resources. They can do one of only two things. Either they can increase VAT to meet the costs or they can broaden the range. When I have questioned the Treasury on that, I have been told that the Government's policy is to cut back on personal taxation, that is the tax on income, and to place tax on spending, in other words VAT. I challenge any Conservative Member flatly to deny that the Government will not tax books. I pause, as Shakespeare said, for a reply, but none dare reply, as they know that their Front Bench is capable of such a monstrosity. [HON. MEMBERS: "Nonsense."] If that is the case, I should like one Conservative Member to stand up and deny on behalf of the Government that they will not do it. They did not do it in 1940 when our backs were to the wall. Not one Conservative Member trusts the Government enough to deny it. That is the extent of their faith in their own Government.

If books and publications are to be taxed, there will be, by definition, a tax on knowledge and learning matter. A tax on learning and knowledge is a tax on democracy as it is not possible to have democracy unless there is an informed democracy. One of the problems at the moment is the profound attack on democracy that the present price of books presents, but that ignores the financial censorship that would arise from a tax on books. If Conservative Members do not remember 1940 they may remember when a tax was last put on publications. It was the Stamp Act of the 18th century, the result of which was Britain's loss of the American colonies. That is a hell of a price to pay for taxing books.

Dr. Godman: Might I compliment my hon. Friend on raising the level of the debate? That is to be expected as he is a product of the Scottish education system. Is he aware that the Western Isles council has had to make the sad decision not to buy any books for its libraries this year because of the Government's refusal to give it the assistance that it badly needs?

Mr. Buchan: I know about the acute problems of the Western Isles. My hon. Friend has given a sad commentary of the state of affairs to which the Government and their minions in the Scottish Office have brought us. If there was one thing of which we were proud in Scotland it was our devotion to learning, books and education. The Western Isles' main exports used to be herring and professors.

Dr. Godman: And master mariners.

Mr. Buchan: I apologise; I should have remembered my hon. Friend. The problem can be seen to be acute, not so much as a result of the philosophy of the Minister for the Arts, who believes that what has to be paid for is good for people — with all the dangers that that holds for schools and universities—as by considering who leads the Conservative party. When the Prime Minister was Secretary of State for Education and Science she was known by the children of Britain as Maggie Thatcher, the milk snatcher. Have we forgotten that? There is something else. It was under her vice-regal control of the Department of Education and Science that museum charges were imposed. It is important to education and to an understanding of the world that museums and galleries should be open to all. She ran into difficulties because many of the bequests in our museums were made on condition that they be shown freely. One thinks of the Erskine of Torry bequest by which the Government were so badly hurt when attempting to introduce charges in Scotland. The matter is serious because charges are being encouraged by the Minister for the Arts and because the maritime museum has been given permission to make charges. Permission has been given on the premise—the philosophy of the prostitute—that if a charge is made the user will appreciate what he or she gets. The Minister said that making charges will encourage people to go only if they have a real interest—so that they will not go just on a whim. I favour people going to museums and galleries just on a whim. None of us knows what sparks off a kid's interest and desire to expand knowledge. I would prefer that people went into a museum to shelter from the rain rather than just stand in a bus shelter.

We see the same attitude from the Secretary of State, who is no longer here—I was about to say, "Who is no longer with us", but that would, perhaps, be too good to be true—in regard to arts schools. The Government are pressing schools of art to amalgamate and merge under some phoney economic argument when the whole point of education in the arts is to have individuality in our independent free-standing schools or colleges of art. We can see the effects of that pressure on one of our great national institutions, the Royal College of Art. It will now halt entry into the department of environmental design. After allowing the freebooters of the 1950s and 1960s to despoil our cities, the Government are now stopping people from studying how to create a better environment. Entry is also being halted into the design education unit, environmental media studies, and the department of design research and the intake into the departments of

painting, printing, photography, ceramics and cultural history is to be reduced. The Conservative party really hates culture.

Mr. Spearing: Yes, the Tories tax it.

Mr. Buchan: They are the new philistines. I regret to say that the Tory gentlemen have long gone.

The Secretary of State has concentrated on design but the best British design has not come from the consciously mechanical or industrial design schools. Many of the great advances in design for which Britain is known throughout the world in recent years have come out of the art schools. Fashion design, for example, came from art schools. Faced with all of this evidence, we realise that the Government dislike learning. They have a price for everything and a value for nothing. As a result, some institutions are fighting back. I was delighted to learn that deans of faculties of arts at most of our universities have formed a standing committee to defend values and to say that there is more to life than creating efficient robot societies. Learning is concerned with rather more than that.

Some of us will have to fight to defend civilisation in the face of this philistinism. Perhaps we can get just one mark of response from the Government today showing that they will no longer encourage charging for entry to museums and that they will drop the nonsensical proposition of taxing books. They should turn their attention to providing our people with the enhanced leisure that should be the result of education.

8.8 pm

Mr. J. F. Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I hope that the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) will forgive me if I do not follow him down the road that he signposted. I found it interesting that he embraced Victorian beliefs. He talked about Victorian values and philosophy, and it is clear that he and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have much in common. Only on one thing did I seriously fault him. I was under the impression that we lost the American colonies because of a tax on tea, not a tax on stamps.

Mr. Buchan: I do not want to give a history lesson, but the most important factor in bringing together the 13 colonies was the Stamp Act, which was a tax on publications, papers and legal matter. The tea in Boston harbour was a nice little exciting coup d'etat rather than an effective cause.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Member will agree with me that it was the exciting act of theatre in Boston that brought matters to a head and effectively led to the loss of the colonies.

I intend to speak to the debate, which is more than Opposition Members have done. The fact that they have had to wheel in speakers to talk about opium wars, India and Ireland, to bolster their argument, and to take up time, is an indication of the paucity of their thinking.

The opening speech by the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) was disappointing. It seldom rose above the level of the cheque book. Today we have been subjected, not to cheque book journalism, but to cheque book education. The Opposition do not seek to judge education by standards. They try to judge it by the amount of funding available. That seems to be the main thrust of the Opposition's argument. Their argument seems to be that more money automatically equals better education. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Durham, North has returned to his place. No doubt he will intervene in due course. The Opposition's premise is a doubtful one and is not borne out by the facts.

Concern about education is not new. Parents and educationists have felt disquiet for years. If there is any doubt about that, I remind the Opposition of the education Black Papers which my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Dr. Boyson) did so much to bring into being. They were published in the mid and late 1960s.

If Opposition Members do not like references to Black Papers, they should remember that the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) initiated the great debate on education and educational standards in 1976. That debate was an attempt to draw attention to what was properly seen as a decline in standards. But if money were the answer, why did education not greatly improve between the years 1960 and 1980? [HON. MEMBERS: "It did."] No, it did not. Expenditure increased dramatically in that period. On primary schools it increased by 60 per cent. in real terms and on secondary schools by 44 per cent.

That is not the only measure that can be used to gauge the amount of spending on education and decide whether more money really equals better education. An alternative is to consider public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product. In 1960 the percentage in France was 3·4 per cent., in West Germany 3·7 per cent., and in the United Kingdom 4·2 per cent. In 1970 the percentage in France was 4·9 per cent., in West Germany 3·7 per cent., and in the United Kingdom 5·3 per cent. In 1980 the figure for France was 5 per cent., for West Germany 5·6 per cent., and for the United Kingdom 5·8 per cent. We have spent more than our competitors and yet we remain concerned about the quality of education. Opposition Members have not proved the connection between more spending and a better quality of education.

Mr. Radice: Opposition Members may have failed to prove the point, but the hon. Gentleman has just done so. Spending increased in the years that he mentioned, and examination results also improved greatly in that period. The percentages of those passing A-levels, those gaining five O-levels or more, and those leaving school with some examination successes rose in that period.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman has not followed my argument. If what he says is correct, why was it thought necessary to produce the Black Papers? Why did the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth open the great debate? The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. Examination results improved, but they did not improve by 44 per cent. We were not getting value for the money invested in education. There is no automatic relationship between increased spending and an improvement in education.

Mr. Bermingham: Nobody said there was.

Mr. Pawsey: Opposition Members seem to be arguing that more money equals better standards.

Mr. Bermingham: Unless the hon. Gentleman did not take either A-levels or O-levels, he may know from personal experience that the standards required to pass O-levels and A-levels rose substantially between 1960 and 1980.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening, either. If that is so, why did his right hon. Friend start the great debate? Why were the Black Papers published? Why has there been concern among parents, teachers and Governments about the quality of education?

One cannot judge the education service by the funding. Funding is only one of the benchmarks that can be used. Perhaps a better reason for the expressed concern might be found in the reorganisation of education between the early 1960s and early 1970s. Can it be coincidence that it was during and after that major reorganisation that concern about standards properly began to surface? Can it be coincidence that the move away from a selective to a comprehensive system coincided with an expression of disquiet about standards of education? It is fair to say that Her Majesty's inspectors have drawn attention in report after report to the low expectations of teachers. They say that pupils are not stretched and that lower standards are tolerated.

Perhaps we could change all that by bringing together the more academic pupils. That would generate a healthy spirit of competition, which would stimulate their interest and that of teaching staff. I would not argue the case for another major reorganisation of education, but we should encourage the LEAs to allow the emergence of schools which would cater for the academically bright.

My right hon. Friend has already said elsewhere that he will consider any schemes for a gradual movement away from the comprehensive principle. It might be worth reminding the LEAs of that point. We should be spending less time arguing about money, and more time debating the education system itself.

I should like to put four questions to the House. First, does the present education system cater for the brighter pupils? Secondly, does it give job satisfaction to the teaching staff? Thirdly, does it provide value for money? Fourthly, and most importantly of all, could we not improve upon the present system? Even by the criterion of the Opposition, that more money automatically means better standards, we are not doing as well as we should. However, it is fair to remind the Opposition that spending per pupil in real terms has increased since 1979 and that the pupil-teacher ratio in the United Kingdom has never been better.

Incidentally, opposition Members might turn their attention, not just to the pupil-teacher ratio, but to the Opposition-Government ratio. It is surprising how few official Opposition Members are present for a debate initiated by the Opposition.

Mr. Radice: Where are the Conservative Members?

Mr. Pawsey: This is an Opposition debate, but the Opposition are having difficulty in sustaining it. That is my criticism of Labour Members, and it is a criticism that will stand. When hon. Members read the debate in *Hansard*, they will agree that Labour Members do not care about education. If they did, they would now be in the Chamber.

Despite what Labour Members say, falling rolls do not invalidate the figures that I have provided for pupil-teacher ratios and higher per-capita spending. The education service must respond to a dramatic reduction in pupil numbers. That is the choice of parents; it is not a draconian measure introduced by Whitehall. There is no Herod in Elizabeth house.

To emphasise the point about falling rolls, it is interesting to note that in 1977-78 there were 8·5 million children in our schools. By 1990 that figure will have dropped to 6·6 million. Such a remarkable reduction in pupil numbers represents a dramatic revolution that will echo through society for decades to come, and the implications of that revolution must be fully understood.

Recently, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced measures that will lift standards. I say that deliberately and despite the somewhat cavalier comments of the hon. Member for Durham, North. My right hon. Friend has sought to improve the quality of teaching by making available an additional £8·5 million for in-service training. He is ensuring that student teachers will spend about 15 weeks at the chalk face. Moreover, they will specialise in age ranges and in one or two subjects. He is making available to local education authorities a further £14 million to help them to employ replacement teachers, to improve training in school management and to help to overcome the problems of shortage subjects.

My right hon. Friend will be calling for a regular appraisal of teachers. Clearly, he believes that there is a positive relationship between well-trained teachers and higher standards. He is right to draw that conclusion, because education depends above all on the interaction of minds. The teacher holds the key. There is a fairly simple equation in education: if there is good head teacher, he will attract good staff; if there is good staff, it will be a good school. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am delighted to hear those echoes of agreement. I join Conservative Members in applauding the work of teachers, who do their best in what are not always the easiest of times.

Mr. Spearing: On Thursday of last week, in reply to an intervention in which I suggested that the Secretary of State wished to impose on teachers a cut in pay, the right hon. Gentleman implied that he would be willing to contemplate a little more pay for teachers, or even more than that, if they agreed to the system of evaluation that he is now presenting. If that is so—the Secretary of State is here and can correct me if I am wrong—does the hon. Gentleman believe that he will get the best from teachers by saying, "I will cut your pay unless you accept my system of appraisal, even if it is accepted as possible"? Would he be a good headmaster?

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman is using his parliamentary expertise to pose a question to me which, had he been here at the start of the debate, he should have more properly put to my right hon. Friend. Therefore, he will forgive me if I do not answer him. It will teach him to be here earlier next time.

I welcome plans for more parental involvement. Those plans will raise standards, because, irrespective of party dogma, parents will undoubtedly seek the best for their children. They are unlikely to promote peace studies, for example, if that promotion is at the expense of mathematics or English. Parents, using the powers which I hope they will receive in the not-too-distant future, will ensure that the standards at their children's schools are as good as they can be. Nothing concentrates the parental mind as much as their children experiencing the latest progressive fashions.

I read with some interest in *The Times* yesterday an article entitled, "Why Meacher was the last straw", by Mr. Eric Moonman, a former Labour Member of Parliament, who has now seen the light. He said:

"Members of local health authorities who are also Labour Party members are being asked, on House of Commons paper, to record, for the benefit of Mr. Meacher, details of the sex, age, political affiliation and voting habits of all members of the authority."

That is what is happening in health authorities. If Labour Members have their way, how long will it be before a letter on House of Commons paper goes to school governing bodies? We do not want that. We need more involvement of parents in the schools which their children attend.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pawsey: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment — *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but I am being pressed not to give way by my hon. Friends, who have a genuine interest in the debate. I have given way a great deal, so the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not do so now.

I was disappointed that no Labour Member referred to religious education. The subject interests many thousands of parents, and I hope that the safeguards with reference to religious education that were built into the Education Act 1944 are retained, because they are so important.

The Gracious Speech mentioned the European Court ruling on corporal punishment, and to comply with the ruling the Government will soon introduce a Bill. It is an unhappy matter. It is unfortunate that the European Court did not give sufficient consideration to the customs and traditions of the United Kingdom. We have used caning as a means of discipline for many years, but other countries have different systems. In France, schools believe in suspension, and when a child is suspended from a French school the social security benefits which are normally paid are not given for the duration of the suspension. That is a much more draconian punishment than the one we employ in the United Kingdom. It affects not only the child but the whole family, and that is to be regretted.

Eastern European schools operate a different system. The child's misdemeanours are posted on the notice board at the father's workplace so that all his colleagues can see what his child has been up to at school. How would Opposition Members take a Bill that sought to introduce that in place of corporal punishment? It is an unhappy business to recognise this court ruling. I realise that we have little choice if we are to remain within the law, but it is unfortunate that the traditions and customs of our country have not received fair consideration from the European Court.

8.30 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): A few moments ago the Labour party was accused of not taking education seriously, in a speech that, with great respect to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), contained not only error, wrong assumptions and cant, but an over-large amount of rubbish. To start at the end, the hon. Gentleman does not know or recognise that we are the only country in the civilised world that seems to think that it is permissible for children to be beaten, sometimes in public, for their misdemeanours. The Americans, the Canadians, the Australians, the French, the Germans, the Russians and the Poles do not need to do it—across Europe nobody does it. Apparently, we have some hedonistic instinct that leads us to tolerate such behaviour. My only regret is that the Government did not have the courage to go all the way and ban corporal punishment once and for all. As sure as night will follow day, corporal punishment will come to an end in both the public and private sectors before the century is out. When it does, we shall have taken one further step on the road to civilisation.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Teachers are now being left very isolated, with few sanctions that they can enforce. In ideal circumstances, there would be massive parental support when there is indiscipline by the child in school. However, much consideration has to be given in these less than ideal circumstances to ways of providing support to teachers if corporal punishment in schools is to be finally banned. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that in the meantime we should not rush headlong until we have established sanctions that are acceptable and will be supportive of teachers in classrooms. On many occasions they have to face assault from unruly pupils.

Mr. Bermingham: The hon. Gentleman is trying to put the cart after the horse, as is normal. In removing corporal punishment, we are seeking to remove a barbaric practice that has been shown by psychiatrists to have effect in later life. As well as removing corporal punishment —this is why I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will follow the Opposition into the Lobby tonight—we should be putting into schools the support system that teachers need and deserve, and that are called for in our motion. The interesting difference between the Opposition motion and the Government amendment—a difference that occurs in many other matters—is merely of one missing word. The word missing from the Government motion is "investment", which is present in our motion. The Government seem frightened of the word "investment".

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth failed lamentably to speak about investment. I do not propose to go over his speech inch by inch, because that would take a long time. His speech could be readily answered because it contained so many errors of fact. I agree that pupil-teacher ratios are falling, as are the numbers of pupils. Do we not have a heaven-sent opportunity as a result? We have the buildings, but we are now talking about mothballing schools, closing them or selling them. This is the Government of the quick buck. Anything that they can lay their hands on and sell, they will get rid of, whether it is playing fields, schools or whatever. What do they do with the proceeds? Do they invest in our industries or society? No — the money goes in handouts to their supporters, when it should be going into investment, because education is an investment in the future. It is an investment in the generations to come.

I am not satisfied with the standards in our schools. In the past 20 years, they have increased greatly, but they are still not high enough. I want to see more investment. I want children to be better educated. People should be able to go back later in their lives for further education, which is further investment in them as human beings and further investment in our society and in our future. That is the sort

[Mr. Bermingham]

of education system towards which we should be moving, but we are not. At best we are standing still, and in some cases we are declining.

Over the past 20 or 30 years, HMI reports have said that only one fifth of LEAs have made satisfactory or better provision for library assistance, the programme of maintenance in schools has continued to be less than satisfactory or poor in 54 of the 97 LEAs, and in two fifths of the LEAs the provision of books and equipment was less than satisfactory. Nothing seems to be right—we are simply not meeting standards. Why is that? I have the horrible sick feeling that the reason is that many of the sons and daughters of Government supporters are in private sector schools. The rest of us can go to the wall in the public sector. I have said before and I shall say again that the Government's attitude is, "If you can pay for it you can have it but if you look to the state to provide it you will get the minimum to get by."

I welcome the movement from examinations to assessments in the Sheffield speech. I have some experience of the education world, having taught for about a year, been a governor of many schools and a vice-chairman of a further education college for some years, and having gone through the system myself. I have always felt that to judge a child on the results of examinations such as the 11-plus, O-level or A-level, which is one performance, is unfair. He or she might not be well or might have trouble at home, or have pressures on him or her. It is far better for the child's development during that year of schooling to be the measure of its advancement. That reflects the child's capability, so I welcome this movement.

However, I am worried about the problem of a national curriculum. Education is meant to reflect the area where the child is educated. The needs of Durham and of Surrey are in some ways different, because of the different environments, and education should reflect those environments. I am worried about the idea that "London knows best".

Mr. Spearing: Whitehall knows best.

Mr. Bermingham: My hon. Friend is correct—Whitehall knows best.

There should be certain levels in mathematics, science, English, history and other such subjects, but I do not accept the concept that the content of the history course can be laid down, because that can reflect a political view, and it worries me. There might be, just as there was last Session, a move by a Government Back Bencher to ban peace studies, for example. Children have a right to be taught such subjects. Once we begin to ban, to proscribe and to say that this or that shall not be taught, we are on the road to totalitarianism. It is the road that was trodden in Germany in the 1930s and in parts of Russia from 1918 onwards. It is a road where Big Brother or Whitehall knows best. That is what worries me about a national school curriculum. I do not object to levels of attainment being suggested and agreed by discussion. I object to dictation from Whitehall or anywhere else, because that is not in the interests of the children.

Many Opposition Members are deeply worried about education. We do not believe that we have yet put enough investment into it. We have improved it and, in many Socialist-controlled local authorities such as my own, levels of achievement have been improving. I know from personal experience as a member of a local education committee for some six years that levels went up steadily over that period. However, Opposition Members do not believe that we have gone far enough. We know that there is still a need for more. We know that improvement is necessary, and we are determined to see that society gets what it deserves, which is a first-class education service. But that requires investment, which we fear this Government will not make.

8.42 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): It has been rightly said in this debate that the standard of education has not changed for the worse in terms of resources since 1979. Looking at the amount of money spent on each pupil in our system today, we see that more money is being spent proportionately than ever before. The pupil-teacher ratio is better. We are spending £7·7 billion, which is a great deal of money and which compares extremely favourably with the year 1979-80, when only £4·6 billion was spent.

During that period, we have seen a great drop in the number of pupils. I do not seek to say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the education system should merely stand still on that basis. The purpose of my argument is to encourage him to have vision, to look at the sort of education system that we want in the future and, therefore, to plan ahead.

I appreciate my right hon. Friend's problems. All of us do. We have an economy which is dependent to too large an extent on oil exports. We have to strengthen that economy so that, in the future, basic industries can produce, without the aid of oil, sufficient money to pay for good education and social services systems.

I was always brought up to believe that the time to plan was when one had nothing. In my opinion, this is the time to plan.

The position today is quite simple. We face a social revolution that we in the House cannot afford to ignore. In the future, people will not work in the way that they have in the past, on the basis of full employment. That being so, the sort of education system that we have to create is one that will prepare people for fewer working hours, for earlier retirement and for staying on longer at school. We should be planning that system now.

Two factors come immediately to mind. The first is the need for greater training and education for the jobs of the future, which inevitably will require skills. It will be no good to have no skill. Only those with skills will have jobs. We must also educate for leisure. That is the way that we must go and we must look at our education system in that light.

The days of the cycle in which one left the family and had a child, that child went to school and was educated, he left school, found a job and immediately began the cycle again, have gone. Society is changing fundamentally, and that is the message that we have to get across to the pupils in our schools. It is the educative function that we must get across to them.

I appreciate that there are problems today with funding, but looking to the future we must produce the best quality teachers. In my opinion, it is wrong that we pay a head teacher in a primary school £12,000. Bearing in mind the responsibility of the job, it is a wholly inadequate salary. A grade 1 teacher on scale 1 starting to teach earns about £75 or £80 a week take-home pay, with all his training. We

have to rectify this for the future. We have to give people an incentive to go into the teaching profession. Only in that way shall we produce the best education system.

We face falling rolls in our secondary schools of dramatic proportions in the next few years. We must work towards protecting the curriculum base of those schools, and that means——

Mr. Dunn: Now.

Mr. Hind: I am glad to hear my hon. Friend say that. I agree that we must begin now and work towards it.

A third factor that I press upon my hon. Friend is the need for the implementation of the Warnock report and providing the resources for bringing disabled children into our schools and making sure that they are properly cared for and suitably able to be taught.

A fourth factor has already been alluded to by one of my hon. Friends. It is to take the politicisation out of our school system. At present, we have too much of it. The Lancashire education committee, with which I am familiar, provides a good example. There are areas of my constituency which time and time again elect Conservative councillors with enormous majorities, yet the schools and their governing bodies are dominated by Labour party supporters, who do not represent the community. I impress upon the House the need for governing bodies that are community-based. What is more, I do not mean just parents, because I do not go all the way with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in wanting to see a majority of parents. I want to see parents and teachers from the area.

I quote the example of a school in Aughton in my constituency, where a local councillor with a majority of 1,000 votes was removed from her post as chairman of the governors by a woman who stood against her and got fewer than 100 votes simply because she belonged to the party in power. That is quite wrong.

Still in Lancashire, I hear from governors and head teachers that where they have had chairmen of governors belonging to the Labour party they have been told not to press for further resources because those resources should go into other areas which were obviously of greater need. I could not agree more, but when it comes to televsion sets, videos and basic teaching equipment, surely they should be distributed on an equal basis. There are arguments for special teaching facilities for deprived areas, but they do not extend to painting walls and providing the basics in our schools. This should not happen, and we must prevent it in the future.

I quote another example, that of Aughton St. Michael's, a Church of England school. It was located on two sites, and an agreed proposal was put before a sub-committee of the Lancashire county council to locate the school on one site and to build two new classrooms. The chairman of the Lancashire education committee walked in and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we are not doing this." All the governors and everyone else involved believed that the proposal was going through, but the whole thing was stopped there and then.

The introduction of peace studies is a typical example. Instead of allowing the subject to be dealt with in religious education, history or general periods, we are allowing politics to interfere. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) said, authorities such as Lancashire county council are doing one thing that should be stopped—putting politics before children.

We must have vision and that vision must include an increase in nursery education. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister has that in mind as an important objective as soon as resources are available. We have done a good job with the resources currently available. Let us now plan and build for the future the education system that we all want.

8.50 pm

* **Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): As a Lancashire Member, I must first correct the impression given by the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) that the situation on governing bodies is a new development since Labour took control in 1981. When the Conservatives were in control at county hall they controlled every governing body in Burnley, although the majority of people there elected Labour county and borough councillors as well as a Labour Member of Parliament. I agree that there are problems with the present system, but criticism cannot be levelled at one particular political party. I agree that governing bodies should be more representative of the locality and that a county-wide basis is perhaps casting the net too wide.

I agree, too, that insufficient attention is paid to nursery education. Far more resources should be devoted to providing education facilities for the under-fives. Due to the foresight of the former county borough before local government reorganisation my area is fortunate in having good average provision in this respect, but I know that there is an acute shortage in many parts of the country.

In an age of new technology, a changing society and new developments in industry we must recognise that education and the leisure industries will have an increasing role in the future. We must accept that education will not end at the age of 16 or 18. People must be able to move in and out of education at all stages of their lives and resources must be made available to meet that demand, which will undoubtedly increase considerably in the years ahead

I do not speak as an education expert, although I was chairman of one governing body and served on many others before I was elected to the House last year. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. Hughes) that the morale of teaching staff is at a very low ebb. When I was chairman of a governing body I had the difficult task of choosing just one out of a very large number of applicants. I was also aware that many of those who were appointed were then unable to advance, due to the lack of movement. Voluntary redundancy terms have also had to be negotiated. Lancashire has recently had to announce that a further 200 voluntary redundancies will be necessary to keep within their budget constraints. It is regrettable that so many excellent teachers at all levels have had to leave the profession in recent years. The recent announcement is a further blow to education in the area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South also mentioned the shortage of books. Only last weekend my 15-year-old daughter, who is studying for O-levels next year, asked me whether I could photocopy her English literature book, "A Man for all Seasons", because there were not enough copies and she had to return it on Monday. Having been unable to buy a copy on Saturday, I had to photocopy the book at 11 pm on Sunday so that she could give it back on Monday. Acute shortages of this sort must be rectified.

[Mr. Peter Pike]

Education will be a major growth area in the years ahead and it needs more, not fewer, resources.

8.55 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I must correct the view of the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham), who implied that all Conservative Members came from privileged backgrounds and thus could not understand the problems of people living in the slums. I do not wish to cast aspersions on the house in the east end in which my parents still live and in which I lived for many years, but it could scarcely be described as a palace. I certainly did not come from a privileged background. I had an ordinary state education and I am delighted to say that I sit very comfortably on the Conservative Benches. The Opposition should not judge us so harshly. We genuinely understand the difficulties of people being educated in areas with housing problems.

The Conservative election manifesto last year contained a commitment to improve education standards. Bolstered by the Education Act 1980 we are now moving towards that end. Parental choice and reorganisation of governing bodies will all help towards that. Naturally, however, people become concerned and frustrated when progress is not so rapid as one would wish. Indeed, some people believe that in some schools under some local authorities there is not a full commitment to improving standards. Happily, that is not the position in my constituency, which is blessed with excellent infant, junior and secondary school teachers. They are hard-working and dedicated people.

Since January, however, we have faced unexpected problems because in the past 12 months more than £1,500,000 worth of damage has been done to schools by arsonists. There are 59 schools in my constituency and 43 of them have been attacked. I have appealed to Essex county council to launch an immediate inquiry into the security of our schools and I am glad to see that it is taking up the matter urgently. The local police and fire services have reacted marvellously in seeking the co-operation of local headmasters, residents and other affected persons to try to prevent any further attacks.

I emphasise that there is little point in worrying about education provision while our schools are inadequately protected. It must be the responsibility of all local education authorities to provide adequate caretaking facilities, suitable alarm systems and evening patrol security cover. There can be no doubt that all parents support us in our desire to see improvements in the standards of education. They rightly adopt the maxim that parents cannot give their children brains, but they can at least give them the best start in life.

The pupil-teacher ratio between 1950 and 1980 has decreased by 20 per cent., which many would say has helped tremendously. However, I smile when I consider my education in the London borough of Newham. I was often in classes of 50 and the teachers still gave us excellent tuition and kept order to a high standard.

I wanted to talk about the excellent college of further education in Basildon, but, unfortunately, time does not allow.

Education is one of those subjects on which everyone considers himself an expert, if only on the premise that at some time we have all been to school. Advice comes from all quarters—the Government, the Opposition, myself, teachers, parents, the unions, and so on. But before putting our clever theories forward we should remember that it is the future of young lives that we are talking about and, ultimately, the future of the nation.

9 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Most people in Britain can think of hundreds of reasons why we need to improve and extend education. Few can think of reasons why we need less education and why we should be contracting it. With all the arguments before the Secretary of State, the Chancellor should have had little chance to cut the education budget in his autumn statement. Nobody in Britain really wants tax cuts if they are at the expense of denying our children the opportunities that many of us have enjoyed.

The Secretary of State should have been like the stoat — able to mesmerise the floppy rabbit. Instead, the Chancellor has savaged the Secretary of State. Despite all the educational and social arguments, the Secretery of State has allowed his Department to be cut, and cut drastically.

It is amazing, having surrendered in that way, that he can table such a complacent amendment which talks about "developing the skills and abilities of all children"——

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman keeps on talking about a cut. There is not a cut, either in money terms or in real terms. The hon. Gentleman could not have heard what I said. There is a 6 per cent. increase in money against a forecast of 4·5 per cent. inflation and a 2 per cent. fall in school populations.

Mr. Bennett: I am sorry that the Secretary of State seems to believe his own statements. The figures show a rather different picture. There is an increase of £540 million in the expenditure for next year compared with this year — 4·1 per cent. extra expenditure. But given inflation of 4·5 per cent. that is a cut of 0·4 per cent. The Department's press release talks about opportunities for improving services if, for example, there are further economies in caretaking and cleaning costs. The protection of educational spending depends on teachers accepting a pay increase, which I am sure none of them will find acceptable. Less money will be available for education next year.

Therefore, the Government amendment is extremely complacent. It will not do anything at all to improve education opportunities for the handicapped child or for the child whose parents are on supplementary benefit. It will deny higher education opportunities to many students, particularly those referred to earlier, whose parents disapprove of their behaviour or just do not think that higher education is suitable for them. In the next 12 months the Government will deny educational opportunities to many people.

I also feel very aggrieved that once again the Government are turning to school meals for further economies. There have already been many exchanges in the Chamber about the number of children who end up having nothing more to eat than chips and gravy. As a result, many of them do not get the full benefit from their education. There is considerable evidence that children are not alert enough in schools because of the conditions under which they are brought up. I think that it is now a joke among school kids that school dinners will not spoil their

appetites in between the bags of crisps. That is a reflection of the way in which we have allowed food standards in schools to diminish.

In the past 12 months the Secretary of State has been trying to convince the country that student numbers will fall over the next few years and that resources for universities, polytechnics and colleges of higher education may be cut by 1 or 2 per cent. However, the country has decisively rejected that. So the Secretary of State, instead of accepting that student numbers should be increasing, is trying to achieve his ambition of fewer students by imposing a savage cut in student support. That is probably one of the worst aspects of the way in which the education service is being cut following the autumn statement.

In the Secretary of State's press release he has accepted a £18 million cut in capital expenditure for education. Not only will education suffer as a result but the construction industry and the capital equipment manufacturers will also suffer. The Secretary of State's press release assumes that there is a possibility of an expansion in the number of 16 and 17-year-olds staying on in education. My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) and others have argued the importance of encouraging young people to stay on in education instead of drifting away into youth training schemes and so on. But the reality is that many drift away from education because of the economic difficulties of staying on at school. If their parents are unemployed, it is extremely difficult for young people to face up to staying on at school, with the extra costs and problems that it causes for the parents. It is high time that a comprehensive system of income support was introduced for those 16 to 19-year-olds who choose to stay on in education instead of going on the dole, joining youth training schemes or taking jobs which are perhaps not suitable for them and consequently force others on to schemes.

The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West said that the Government—I am pleased to say—have been able to increase the amount available for in-service training. But the increase in money is extremely small. Over the country as a whole, I think that it works out at about £35 per teacher available for in-service training. Given the Secretary of State's long shopping list—and I approve of much of it—to try to improve education standards, the amount of money available for in-service training is pitifully small. If we want to make a reality of ensuring that most primary schools teach science effectively and improving the curriculum in secondary schools, far more money must be available for in-service training. It is a question not of getting one or two specialists retrained, but of giving most teachers the opportunity at some point in each 12-month period to obtain some in-service training.

When the Secretary of State issued his press release there seemed to be many areas in which he was apologising for cuts. But there was no reference at all to many other areas. The hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) drew attention to the Education Act 1980 and to the whole question of dealing with the special education needs of young people. The Education Act was right in principle, but it was a disgrace that the Government did not produce any resources to implement it. There are still no resources to implement it. Consequently, there are carefully prepared statements about the needs of those children but they only highlight the fact that there are not the resources to do the right thing.

The principles of the Act have been implemented, but we are denying them by failing to make the resources available. We do not have enough nursery places for handicapped children. When the legislation was going through the House everyone agreed that nursery education was important for all children, and that it was particularly important for handicapped children. We agreed that the education of handicapped children should begin as early as possible to help them overcome their handicaps.

No money is available to train teachers in ordinary schools to teach children with special needs. As a result, integration does not work. No money is available to adapt buildings. The Act places a duty on local education authorities to provide education for 16 to 19 year-old handicapped youngsters. Little provision is made for that age group. Any Secretary of State who tabled an amendment such as that on today's Order Paper should have on his conscience the fact that we are still doing far too little for handicapped youngsters in our education system. If we want to make the 1981 Act work we must find the resources.

The Department's press release says that the Secretary of State has asked the caretaking and cleaning services to pay for the extra books, the extra equipment and the repairs. It states:

> "If costs can be contained and savings made elsewhere—for example, in caretaking and cleaning costs—there should be scope for some further improvement in expenditure per pupil compared to 1982-83 levels".

The Secretary of State is being harsh if he expects the cleaners and caretakers to pay for improvements.

When I visit schools I am upset because I see pupils and teachers working hard. So often the lack of repairs and cleaning gives a wrong impression of a school. Many parents think that a school's standards are poor because of the lack of care and maintenance. We should now spend money on repairs and maintenance.

I often hear parents say that a school is in such a bad state that they should volunteer to do the cleaning or repairs themselves. We should not have to run our education system in that way, but I suspect that the Government are hoping that people will feel that the state maintains and repairs so inadequately that they should volunteer to do the work themselves.

The Government have talked about making a little more money available for books and other equipment. A critical HMI report was issued in 1981-82 and for a year there was a substantial increase in the money made available for books and materials. After that improvement, provision slipped in secondary schools and remained the same in primary schools.

What are the Government to do about school books? The rumour is that VAT will be imposed upon books. That is something for the Budget and it will be deplorable if it happens. It will have a crucial impact on the education budget for next year. A 15 per cent. increase in the price of books and other written materials means a 15 per cent. cut in expenditure. The Government must make it clear now that they will not impose VAT on educational materials and books. If they will not give that undertaking, I hope that the Minister of State will make it clear that he will compensate fully for any VAT on the education budget.

[Mr. Bennett]

There is another area in which the Government's record is deplorable—nursery education. There should be better nursery provision for the handicapped. Despite evidence of the great benefit to children and parents of nursery education, there are no proposals in the autumn statement and there is no money available for the expansion of nursery education.

A large number of our primary schools have spare cash and capacity. A large number of unemployed teachers could attend conversion courses on nursery education. Indeed, we have a large number of unemployed nursery nurses. We have a considerable opportunity to expand nursery education, yet the Government appear to be determined to let that opportunity pass. In the EC, especially in France and Germany, nursery education is taken for granted. Almost all three and four-year-olds in those countries enjoy nursery education. Few three or four-year-olds—in Britain enjoy nursery education.

I think that the Minister is becoming worried about the Government's education policy. He is obviously upset about the mounting evidence in the HMI reports about the lack of resources. However, rather than acting on those reports, he is keen to muzzle their publication. I hope that he will come clean and say that he is fully committed to publishing the HMI report. It was his Government who began publication of the reports. I hope that he will make it clear that he has no intention of reneging on that.

The Minister does not appear to be too happy about the Secretary of State's belief in market forces; he is beginning to realise its disastrous effect on teachers. The Secretary of State continues to tell the House that there is no shortage of teachers, so they must be well paid. I find a shortage of trained people for craft, design and technology in almost every school that I visit. Many schools are short of teachers of physics and chemistry. The Minister appreciates that it takes time to train teachers —at least three or four years. Indeed, it takes longer than that. Third and fourth-year pupils must decide whether they want to be teachers.

While the Secretary of State relies on market forces, the Minister has gone out of his way to draw attention to a new film aimed at recruiting more primary school teachers. There has been a nice press release, and I understand that the Minister is becoming worried about the supply of primary school teachers. I am glad that he has said that an additional 2,000 must be trained each year in the late 1980s.

However, if that film is shown to a group of sharp third and fourth-year students, they will immediately ask how much the teachers are paid and how long is a teacher's training. The Minister can tell us that a newly trained teacher receives about £7,239 a year. No doubt one pupil in the class will ask how long is the training for a policeman and how much does he earn. It takes much less time to train a policeman than it does to train a teacher, yet that policeman earns almost £3,000 more than a teacher. I am glad that the Minister is launching the film with such enthusiasm, but he must look carefully at the teachers' rates of pay. The market economy will be as great an influence on recruitment as the film will be.

I understood the Secretary of State to say in his speech that if the teachers made a further sacrifice next year there would be a little more equipment and a little more of this and that. Teachers are bitterly disappointed with the way in which they have been treated in this year's pay negotiations.

If the Secretary of State expects teachers to accept a 3 per cent. increase next year, he will be disappointed. They will not accept 3 per cent. next year and he must realise that he will have to find some extra resources. If he does not, he will destroy morale to such an extent that any attempt that he wants to make to improve standards—an attempt that I believe the whole House would like to see —will be abortive. That will happen because of his failure to pay teachers an adequate sum and to make it clear to them that the Government have a belief in them.

It is unfortunate that the Government and their predecessors have had a tendency in recent years to seek far more central control of education, especially of the curriculum. It is unfortunate that the Secretary of State is not prepared to trust teachers, local education authorities, parents and pupils to decide what is relevant to them. It seems that he does not trust local democracy and that he feels that it is far easier for a Secretary of State to be able to dictate to local schools what they should teach rather than cajoling and persuading them to opt for a certain course.

Foreign language teaching fails almost the majority of the population. Even when students have managed to achieve O-level French, many of them have an almost total inability to communicate in French.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the courses that are being run at the St. Martin's teacher training college at Lancaster, which have spread the capacity to speak French at all levels throughout Lancashire and Cumbria? They are outstandingly good courses and there are graded tests. Even the parents join in. These courses should be spread throughout the country.

Mr. Bennett: I am well aware that some imaginative work is being done in some areas but I am aware also that the standard of many who have passed through the education system and passed the tests is very low when it comes to a practical use of the language. Central direction will not improve upon that.

In many areas there is a major problem in motivating children to learn a foreign language. Perhaps it is all too easy for us to think that we can safely assume that many in other countries will speak English. In many areas there will be greater motivation to learn a language other than French as a second language. It would be far more sensible of the Government to say that all secondary schools should aim at teaching youngsters a second language. It is ridiculous for them to say which language it should be. It would be far better for a decision to be made locally on the most suitable second language to teach.

It is especially unfortunate that the number of youngsters who have learnt Russian has declined steeply in recent years. There are very few people who learn to speak Japanese while at school. However, the Japanese are only too willing to speak English while selling to us. If we want to sell to the Japanese, those engaged in the selling should speak Japanese. How many schools are teaching either Russian or Japanese?

I think that almost everyone is keen to see primary science developed but it is extremely difficult to say what elements of primary science should be developed in a particular locality. It is clear that the skills that need to be

developed in primary schools can be catered for through physics, chemistry, biology and botany. It would be far more appropriate for an individual school, depending on the environment and the skills of the teachers, to choose how to teach primary science instead of having the subject imposed from the centre.

I have said many times in the House that we proudly claim in Government publications that we have a free education service without acknowledging that there is a series of charges that impose problems for youngsters from families on low incomes or living on benefits. I am only too conscious of the fact that, when I was a young teacher, it seemed simple to say to parents that 50p was needed for a trip for geography field work or a history visit, never stopping to think that other people in the school were doing the same. As a parent, I am well aware that kids come home from school and say, "Can I have this? Can I have that?" Some schools have to supplement the local authority provision by running Christmas fairs, raffles and other fund-raising efforts. Many of those programmes place financial pressures on low-income parents.

I have referred to the problem of 16 to 19-year-olds and the numbers who ought to go on the youth training schemes rather than stay at school. A grant would make a great deal of difference to those students.

The way in which the Government handled the announcement on student grants was appalling. The Government have not yet met the National Union of Students to discuss this round of student grants. Unilaterally, the Government announced the abolition of the minimum grant and the imposition of fees on people who will not receive any grant.

When I challenged the Secretary of State about the problems of those youngsters whose parents will not even fill out forms because they disapprove of their sons or daughters going into higher education, he said, "Give us a solution." There should have been full discussions with the NUS and an attempt to solve those problems before unilateral action was taken.

There has been an amazing about-turn by the Conservative party. The Prime Minister, when in opposition, said that she wanted students to be independent of their parents. Last year and this year the Government moved massively in the opposite direction and have made increasing numbers of students more dependent on their parents.

I should have liked to have the time to discuss further education a little more. The House should return to this subject, to which it gives far too little attention.

Mr. Parris *rose*——

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I shall not give way now.

We pressed the Secretary of State to tell us whether he was now satisfied that a compromise had been worked out between the local authorities and the MSC. We were not sure whether the right hon. Gentleman was saying that he was not satisfied with the compromise, or was saying that at that stage in the debate he did not want to say anything. The Under-Secretary of State should tell the House whether he is satisfied that a compromise has been worked out and where he sees it going. The proposals to take from the colleges 30 per cent. of the work in non-advanced further education which is vocationally orientated and give it to the MSC caused a great deal of ill-will in the colleges. That change seemed to be unnecessary.

I have no evidence that employers are dissatisfied with what the colleges are able to do. Many employers want the colleges to do more and to have better equipment, but basically they are not dissatisfied with what the colleges are going to do. That is another example of the way in which the Government want to remove people's democratic opportunities to influence colleges and hand the work to the MSC, which is in no way accountable to local democracy even though, to a certain extent—not all that great—it is accountable to Ministers. I strongly argue that we want clear information about how the Government see developments.

The Government should spend a bit more time looking at what has happened to apprenticeship schemes. Such schemes were crucial in many instances to feeding people through the process of further education into higher education. Because of the decimation of industry and the even greater destruction of apprenticeship courses, the approach through further education into higher education has disappeared. Much more time should be given to debating that aspect.

The complacency of the Secretary of State as shown in the amendment sums up his position. It seems that, at the end of his political career, he is losing his opportunities. [HON. MEMBERS: "Many more years".] Many more years? Well, let us see. It was my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) who reminded the House that the Secretary of State's career started with the high-rise flats. He went on to reorganise the Health Service. He was enthusiastic about monetarism in the 1970 to 1979 period. He was at the Department of Industry when he pretty well decimated British industry. He was the man who brought Ian MacGregor to this country. I do not believe that he can be pleased about that. In the Department of Education and Science he had an opportunity to repent of some of the crises that he created.

Instead of setting about doing what is necessary for education—many people agree with what the Secretary of State has been saying about education—he has failed to put the money where he has put his words. That is a fundamental failure. It is no good talking about raising educational standards, expanding educational opportunity or giving a fair deal to the handicapped unless the Government come up with the money. That is the problem. The Government's record in education has been one of cuts and a failure to take the opportunities to expand education when the money was available from North sea oil to do so.

We have had a tragic missed opportunity, but we shall not know what opportunities the country has missed in education until the Japanese come selling to us. I suggest that the House should vote for our motion and decisively reject the amendment.

9.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): Perhaps I should start by telling the House about a matter of particular pride for Conservative Members. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of his appointment to the Front Bench of our party.

This has been a most interesting, intriguing and, at times, strange debate. We have had speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel), for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths), for

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Salisbury (Mr. Key), for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden), for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss), for Derbyshire, West (Mr. Parris), for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) and for Basildon (Mr. Amess). We have had a strange assortment of speeches from Opposition Members, from the hon. Members for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), for Knowsley, South (Mr. Hughes), for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan), for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham), for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and for Burnley (Mr. Pike). I apologise for sounding like a railway announcer.

We hoped for great things during the course of the debate. The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), on his appointment to the Opposition Front Bench, promised us last November a Supply day on education. He mentioned it once, twice or three further times, but we heard no more about it. That was promised and threatened over the past 12 months, but after today's performance and the general lack of commitment by the Opposition in the debate I rather suspect that the hon. Member for Durham, North wished that he had not bothered.

We have been here for the whole afternoon and we have listened with interest, care, calm and courtesy. As one of the nicest men in this place, may I say that I had hoped for rather more than we received. This debate was to be the showpiece. If it was the showpiece, I should love to see the Rolls-Royce model.

Mr. Radice: The hon. Member may have forgotten that at 6.53 pm on Tuesday 3 April 1984 he made a speech. His memory has plainly just gone.

Mr. Dunn: I remember the speech well. It was one of the best I ever made. As I am starting in a relatively good frame of mind, I should like to congratulate the hon. Member on his re-election to the shadow Cabinet. I am delighted that he was reappointed to the education brief. I am also pleased that he has rejected the invitation to join the alliance. I am delighted that he intends to stay in his own party to fight for the cause in which he believes, at least for the time being.

When the debate started, I expected a tremendous barrage of speeches, comments and points of view and, in truth, there have been many good speeches and sensible comments. But I must say, because I feel that I should, that there have been no speeches from the Social Democratic party and only one from the Liberal party. I am so disappointed——

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): But Conservative Members usually complain if more alliance speakers are called.

Mr. Dunn: Of course I am complaining. This is an Opposition day. If education is so important to the alliance, it is a pity that more members of it were not here during the day. Therefore, Conservative Members are more impressed by the eloquence of absent Members than by the nature of the speeches that have been made.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be an enormous improvement to many debates if there were no speeches from the Social Democratic party and the Liberal party?

Mr. Dunn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but as we are approaching Christmas we must express charity and good will.

I have said that the Department of Education and Science can be a power for extreme good and, occasionally, for evil. In the five years that we have been in government that Department, under two Secretaries of State, has been a power for enormous good, dynamism and improvement in the education service. I remember a distant time when there was, in the words of one of my young son's books, a "wicked witch" called Shirley Williams who occupied the Department of Education and Science and did disastrous things. Her actions were supported by Opposition Members, veterans such as the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and others whose constituencies I have forgotten. During that time, there was an all-out assault on good standards and centres of excellence. Much of the blame for some of the faults in the maintained education service lie absolutely and resolutely at the doorstep of the Labour party.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth referred to the great debate started by the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan). At that time we all wondered why the right hon. Gentleman did what he did. He started the great debate, and there were headlines in the papers for about half a day. Then nothing happened. If one looks back at the course of education history and attempts to establish the high points of Socialist education policy as well as those of the Conservative party, one finds that at the time of that great debate there was not even a bang, but a whisper — [HON. MEMBERS: "A whimper."] Perhaps it was a whimper, or a Wimpy. But the fact is that nothing was done by the Labour party in many years of Socialist Government of which we and, I suspect, Labour Members can be proud.

In a recent debate the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) promised that expenditure on health by a future Labour Government, if ever there were one, would increase by 3 per cent. That amounts to about £500 million in cash terms. The hon. Member for Oldham, West said that that was the bottom line, which I assume is the minimum amount by which the Labour Government would increase expenditure. The hon. Member for Durham, North was canny when he was asked a question on expenditure by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the House on 8 November. My right hon. Friend said that the hon. Gentleman

"must tell the House and the country whether he will commit a future Labour Government, if there ever is one, to provide more money for education via the local education authorities."—*[Official Report,* 8 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 310.]

In reply, the hon. Member for Durham, North talked about the relativities of defence and education expenditure. To be fair, the hon. Gentleman was caught on the hop. My right hon. Friend posed the same question again today and we received the same answer. I accept that expenditure would increase under Labour, but by how much?

Mr. Radice *rose*——

Mr. Dunn: Let me finish the question first. By £100 million? By £500 million? Today, the hon. Gentleman gave a list of demands for more expenditure on this, that and the other and things yet to be thought of. The hon. Gentleman must ultimately put a figure on it.

Mr. Radice: There will probably be some time before the next election and I seem to remember that the Conservative party, when in opposition, did not put a figure to any of its plans until just before the general election. Indeed, I do not think that it gave any figures at all. We are committed to spending more on education. I shall certainly not give a precise commitment at this stage. I have no intention of doing that.

Mr. Dunn: I assume, therefore, that the hon. Member for Oldham, West is in the doghouse as he has done just that. If the hon. Member for Durham, North chooses not to answer the question as I should like, so be it, but I reserve the right to refer to it in future, and I shall.

The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland made a reasoned speech and some interesting points in a telling way. He asked me to comment on the concordat between the Manpower Services Commission and the local authority associations about the proposals on training for jobs. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) also referred to it. I understand that the chairman of the MSC has reached an agreement with the education leaders of the local authority associations which I understand the associations have endorsed. The Government welcome that outcome and are grateful for the co-operation that is now offered by the local authority associations. As the House knows, that will be in the interests of young people. I am sure that both sides of the House are delighted with that result.

I must thank the hon. Member for Durham, North for causing me to be on the front page of *The Times Educational Supplement* for five weeks running. He mentioned the HMI expenditure report. I should like to reiterate what my right hon. Friend said earlier today. We have no intention of varying the present and long-standing arrangements for securing the professional independence of Her Majesty's inspectorate. The practice of publishing HMI reports, for which we take credit, is new and we should all continue to think about how they can be used to the greatest benefit of the education service. That is especially true of the annual report on the effects of local authority expenditure policies.

My right hon. Friend warned about the dangers of over-simplification. I can understand why the press restricts itself to headlines about shortages of resources, but it is less easy to know why, despite all that has been said, Opposition Members insist on saying that levels of provision have got worse during the Government's term of office and that spending much more would automatically improve the quality of education in schools.

The most recent HMI expenditure report noted an overall improvement in resource levels and made it quite clear that the quality of teaching, the proper indentification of pupil needs and the effective management of resources are essential complements to the provision of resources in securing good education.

The hon. Member for St. Helen's, North—

Mr. Bermingham: South.

Mr. Dunn: East or West, it does not really matter—commented on the absence of evidence from the past on which to make a comparative judgment. He did not hear my right hon. Friend observe that we did not have published HMI reports from earlier years so we could not know how low the base line had been in earlier years. We should remember that it was a Conservative Secretary of State who decided to publish HMI reports.

Mr. Bermingham: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but would he not accept that we are not interested in comparisons? We are interested not in the past but in the future. We are commenting on the deficiencies shown in the reports, in the hope that the Government will repair them and that future reports will show fewer deficiencies.

Mr. Dunn: We are conscious of that point. My point is that, if some of the problems had particularly deep historical roots, earlier publications would have revealed them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West made some glowing remarks in my absence. I am sorry that I was not here, because it is always nice to be complimented. He also referred to the decision of the Labour-controlled Derbyshire county council to call in its writing paper and envelopes so that they could be overprinted with the slogan "nuclear-free zone". I understand from a report in the *Daily Star* of 12 November that such an action would involve the authority in the expenditure of about £50,000. [HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful."] The article states:

"Defending what he claims to be a non-political decision, education committee chairman Frank Revel says 'The money we are spending is just a drop in the ocean'".

In Derbyshire, £50,000 is nearly 4 per cent. of total expenditure on school books in 1983-84. I am prepared to give way to the hon. Member for Durham, North so that he can join me in condemning such a gross abuse of expenditure. I see that the hon. Gentleman does not wish to intervene. That is game, set and match to me.

Mr. Buchan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dunn: In my part of the world we have an expression——

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister sought to give way to another hon. Member, not to the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan).

Mr. Dunn: I am sure that the hon. Member for Paisley, South will not mind if I say that I would rather talk to the organ-grinder.

Mr. Buchan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dunn: I am only a tenth of the way through my speech.

Mr. Buchan: The hon. Member has not said anything yet.

Mr. Dunn: The hon. Gentleman must listen patiently.

The Government's plans for local authority expenditure on education for 1985-86 are consistent with our commitment further to improve standards of attainment by pupils. It is up to the LEAs to make the best use of the substantial resources available to them. That means taking every opportunity to redeploy resources as school rolls fall.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman not accept that this year, in practice, local authorities have had to borrow from other areas of the rate support grant some 12 per cent. to subsidise education budgets and that if they

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are to balance their books they must make substantial cuts in education or continue to redirect resources intended for other areas such as personal social services?

Mr. Dunn: I am aware of the problems of LEAs in connection with the competing calls on limited sums of money. I have been a member of a local authority myself —the London borough of Southwark. It is essential to understand that the concern of LEAs should be to get the best value for money. If that means that local authorities — whether Labour or Conservative — will consider alternative means of making the same pound stretch further, more power to their elbow. I would have quoted figures to show the advantages of privatisation, but with only 10 minutes left, and 90 per cent. of my speech still to come, I shall probably not reach them.

The hon. Member for Blackley made an interesting speech, which confused me a little, about the problems of Manchester. I accept that Manchester, like any inner-city area, has problems. None the less, Manchester has got to grips with the problems of surplus places and has taken some schools out of use. The city of Manchester, which is controlled by the Labour party, has a duty to go further and consider the benefits of privatisation. It should consider carefully the advantage to the ratepayer. Labour Members talk about opinion polls which say this, or say that so many ILEA people say that; we have never had an opinion poll of the ratepayers. Ratepayers are a much-denied, much-deluded and much-abused category of people, and the Labour party does not take their views into account, as was shown by the example of Derbyshire.

Mr. Radice: What will the Minister do about Norfolk?

Mr. Dunn: It is a very flat county, Norfolk, but I hope to go there some day and examine the provisions.

Mr. Radice: I am glad that the Minister will consider visiting Norfolk some day. I was there the week before last and I visited the schools whose provisions the HMI criticised. The Minister and the Secretary of State must answer this question: when and how will they provide the resources that are necessary to improve educational provision in Norfolk?

Mr. Dunn: The chairman of Norfolk education authority made it plain that she intends to examine the report with interest and will use it as and when she can. Someone said earlier that my actions in relation to the HMI showed that I was trying to shoot the messenger. The reverse is true. We have given the messenger some arms. The Labour Government did not publish HMI reports, and one wonders whether they would have published these.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich asked about political appointments of head teachers or teaching staff. I must speak for all hon. Members when I condemn those occasions when people are appointed to positions of responsibility in local education authorities because they are good politicians rather than being good for the jobs to which they are appointed. I am sure that I speak for Labour Members as well as Conservative Members.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth mentioned teacher appraisal. I welcome his remarks and his support for the objective assessment of teacher competence at various stages in a teacher's career. The facts are already known to the teachers. The Secretary of State and I must now create a way of gathering those facts objectively and rewarding those who need to be rewarded, or helping those who need to be helped, in the best way possible through the local education authority.

New teachers entering the profession must be adequately trained and suitable for the demanding task that faces them. Our White Paper entitled "Teaching Quality" announced proposals to strengthen initial teacher training. I am pleased to say that they have been implemented. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales have issued rigorous criteria for the approval of initial teacher training courses, and have established a council for the accreditation of teacher education to examine each course against those criteria. The House will know that the council started work in September and is expected to complete its first review of courses three or four years from now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West referred to the advantages of in-service training. The Government welcome in-service training in whatever level it is adopted, if it is to the benefit of pupils and teachers. However, we must address a question to those who organise and take part in in-service training. At the end of the training, do the people who have taken part know more and react better, and have they gained from the experience of undergoing in-service training? If the answer to that question is yes, then in-service training is adequate and worthwhile, and must be to the benefit of all concerned.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth referred to the problems caused by the European Court's decision to end corporal punishment in schools. As the House will know, in the Gracious Speech we announced a forthcoming Bill to secure compliance with the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights of February 1982, that parents who hold a philosophical conviction against corporal punishment should be entitled to have that conviction respected. The Government are bound by that ruling, and can do no other than give effect to it. The choice was between abolishing corporal punishment altogether and creating a system giving parents an option about its use.

Several hon. Members have referred to peace studies. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear his views to the National Council of Women of Britain on 3 March this year. He argued then that, as pupils mature, they should be encouraged to apply their reasoning powers to important issues of the day, including such questions as the morality of war, the conditions that lie behind war, and so on. No matter what standards we set, and what guidelines are laid down by local education authorities, the problem of the perverse teacher in the classroom with 23 children can never be eliminated. We must place our trust in the tolerance and professionalism of the teachers. I hope that those who might seek to abuse their privileged position will refrain from doing so. That must be right.

Mr. Buchan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dunn: No.

Mr. Buchan: What about VAT on books?

Mr. Dunn: VAT on books is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett *rose*——

Mr. Dunn: I have a right in a free society to make my own speech in the way that I choose.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has considered the Green Paper on parental influence in schools. We believe that governors have a greater role and a greater sense of stewardship than they had previously. It is up to the governers, either with the new powers—whatever they turn out to be — or with existing conventions, to operate within their schools, to become familiar with the teaching practices and activities that take place in schools. If more governors went round the premises for which they were appointed, some of the errors and abuses referred to by some of my hon. Friends would not take place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth also referred to religious education in schools. Religious education will always have a vital part to play in the education of all our children. The religious education provisions of the Education Act 1944 are part of a settlement between the churches and the state, which underpin that Act. We have no plans to amend the 1944 Act.

The hon. Member for Blackley referred to a number of problems in Manchester, especially the problems of food and diet for the poor, and I shall write to him about that.

Socialism has failed in this debate. The Labour Opposition will put it to the vote, but will undoubtedly lose. Therefore, I urge my hon. Friends to vote for the Government's amendment and against the motion put down by the Opposition.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 174, Noes 274.

Division No. 8] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Tony
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell, Ian
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S.)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Concannon, Rt Hon J. D.
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cowans, Harry
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, W. W. *(Central Fife)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Dr. Mark *(Durham)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport East)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Ron *(Carlisle)*
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Paisley, Rev Ian
Park, George
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, M.
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Browne, John
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Bulmer, Esmond
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Hon Adam
Carlisle, John *(N Luton)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony

Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Havers, Rt Hon Sir Michael
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hooson, Tom
Hordern, Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Gregory *(Derby N)*
Knight, Mrs Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New F'st)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Fergus
Moore, John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Oppenheim, Rt Hon Mrs S.
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, John *(Oxford)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pollock, Alexander
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Prior, Rt Hon James
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(N Hertf'dshire)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, J.
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ian Lang and
Mr. Timothy Sainsbury.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 32 (Question on amendments), and agreed to.*

Mr. Speaker *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House believes that the future of this nation depends on developing the skills and abilities of all children; congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its policies for raising standards of education for all abilities by action on the curriculum, examinations and teaching quality; and welcomes Her Majesty's Government's policies for securing the most effective use of the substantial resources available for the benefit of the education service.

PETITIONS

Infantry Training Depot, Crickhowell

10.14 pm

Mr. Tom Hooson (Brecon and Radnor): I rise to present a petition by Crickhowell, Cwmdu, Llangattock, Llangenni and Llangynidr community councils in the county of Powys. Their grievance concerns the announced intention of the Secretary of State for Defence to phase out the infantry training depot of the Prince of Wales division at Cwrt y Gollen, Crickhowell, by 1986.

The petitioners are 44 community councillors and they pray that the House will prevent this step. Being myself resident in the immediate vicinity, I know that they truly reflect the strong desire of the area to retain the Army as a good neighbour.

In addition, the councillors undoubtedly speak for Wales. During the highly publicised speculation about the future of Cwrt y Gollen through the early summer months, we attracted widespread support for the depot throughout the Principality.

Ever since Agincourt, Wales has provided infantry soldiers for the British Army, yet today Cwrt y Gollen is the sole remaining Army training depot in Wales. That powerful factor of the Welsh nation's historic identification with the Army must be added to the councillors' concern at the impact of closure on the local economy.

The petitioners pray that Cwrt y Gollen will be retained as a military depot, and we must hope that all possibilities, including its use by the Territorial Army and the other armed services, will be explored.

To lie upon the Table.

PETITION

Drug Addiction

10.15 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, and that of the House, I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of my constituents, mainly in the Possilpark district of my constituency, and on behalf of the residents of the Ruchill area in the adjoining constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mr. Craigen). Indeed, he wishes to associate himself with the petition.

The residents of those districts and indeed, of the Glasgow area, are very perturbed about the problem of drug addiction. Indeed, the first name on the petition is that of Mrs. McHugh, whose son Derek tragically died only a few months ago from a drug overdose. The petition urges the Government to do something about the problem and to curb the activities of drug traffickers in our cities. It states:

To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, the Humble Petition of the residents of Possilpark, Ruchill, and Glasgow showeth

That we are extremely concerned about the level of drug addiction within our communities.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will urge Her Majesty's Government to introduce more drastic measures to deal with the problem of drug abuse and will curtail the activities of drug dealers in this country;

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

I beg leave to present the Petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Ethiopia

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Major.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): As the House may know, I, together with the hon. Members for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood)—both of whom, Mr. Speaker, I know wish to catch your eye later—returned late on Sunday after a six-day fact-finding visit to Ethiopia, which included much travelling in drought-stricken areas, including Tigre and Wollo, extensive discussions with senior members of the Ethiopian Administration, the Ethiopian relief organisation, and with the United Nations and other non-governmental organisations such as the World Food Programme, field directors and relief workers of voluntary organisations such as Oxfam, the Save the Children Fund and the Red Cross.

In the limited time available to me, I do not intend to attempt to describe the consequences of the famine. It is not a famine of biblical proportions; it is worse—it is a holocaust of hunger. There is mile after mile of burnt, brown, barren land that has been without rain for four years. The rivers are dry and local supplies of food are long since exhausted. What should now be a season of harvest is a time of despair and desperation. It is difficult adequately to describe the dimensions of the disaster and I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development is shortly going to Ethiopia to see for himself that holocaust of hunger.

As the world community has at last awakened to the reality of the drought, there is now some hope. Food is starting to reach those in need. The Ethiopian relief agency, the RRC, with the now total support of the Ethiopian Government is moving heaven and earth to get the most desperately needed supplies of food up to northern Ethiopia and the Ethiopian authorities are making every effort to feed everyone, wherever they might be.

The voluntary agencies, their field officers and relief workers are doing fantastic work. I am certain that every penny that has been donated to Oxfam, the Save the Children Fund, the Red Cross, CAFOD and other relief agencies is being put to the best possible use. The grain that Oxfam sent to Ethiopia, together with grain donated by British farmers in the "Send a Tonne" appeal was unloaded in record time and is now being distributed to those in need.

Oxfam field workers in Ethiopia are giving invaluable help and guidance. The Save the Children Fund is giving the chance of life to thousands of children and their mothers. At Korem alone, the Save the Children Fund is daily feeding about 18,000 small children and their mothers. The Ethiopian Minister of Health, who is responsible for co-ordinating Ethiopian relief operations, asked us to go to see him and personally requested us to pass on to the people of Britain the sincere and heartfelt thanks of the people of Ethiopia for all that the British people have done so far in sending funds and food.

There is no doubt that the recent actions by the British Government have served as a catalyst for action. The arrival of the RAF Hercules at Addis Ababa was a visible sign that Britain and the rest of the world were coming to help. The arrival of the RAF shamed Russia and the eastern bloc into responding. The RAF is doing fantastic work ferrying food to areas which until recently were without any food whatsoever. Its professionalism is outstanding. I hope that the RAF will be able to stay in Ethiopia until all urgent needs are met.

I am conscious of the many other practical ways in which Britain is helping both with food and funds. I acknowledge the leadership that the Prime Minister has given in the Council of Ministers in galvanising the European Community into action. I appreciate the considerable efforts by the Minister for Overseas Development both here and in Europe to stimulate as much help as possible.

Food is now getting to people in need in Ethiopia, albeit in small quantities. There is now some hope, but there is also considerable apprehension that what needs to be a consistent 18-month campaign may become on 18-day wonder once it is no longer the focus of the world's attention. There is apprehension that, unless sufficient supplies of food are sustained, thousands upon thousands of men, women, mothers, fathers and children will die early next year. They will starve to death as grain supplies are once again exhausted.

The Save the Children Fund and other relief agencies estimate that people in the drought-stricken areas of Ethiopia require a further 520,000 tonnes of grain to save the millions of lives at risk until next year's harvest. That is about 60,000 tonnes a month, which is only half the rations recommended by the United Nations. At best it is only half a loaf a day per person.

As of last week, only 30 per cent. of that food had been pledged by the world community. Much more will have to be found if thousands are not to die. The figures that the Minister has been given—I suspect by the World Food Programme—of the anticipated arrivals of grain over the next few months are wrong and bear no relation to the information that we gained in Addis Ababa last weekend.

That grain can come only from the West. Those who, like myself, campaigned vigorously for Britain's membership of the European Community did so in the firm belief that Britain and a united Europe could give the world a lead. This year Europe enjoyed a record grain harvest. Our granaries are groaning with grain. Literally millions of tonnes lie in the intervention stores. The people of Britain will not forgive us if we hoard surplus grain here when, elsewhere, thousands are dying simply for the need of such grain.

The farmers have already been paid for the grain in intervention. The only budgetary consideration is the difference between the cost of storing the grain and the cost of shipping it to Ethiopia. The signs are that it costs more to store.

Jim O'Keefe, the President of the European Community, spoke in Brussels last week of thousands dying once all budgetary possibilities were exhausted. He said:

> "We may face a situation in March or April this year when, despite our best efforts, and having exhausted all the possibilities within the Community budget, hundreds of thousands of people are dying."

All that appears to be in danger of being exhausted is the will and resolve of the politicians who control the European Community, and the bureaucrats who administer it, to cut the red tape in accordance with the overwhelming will of the people in the European

Community that our surplus grain should be pledged in whatever quantity necessary to save the starving. Britain should take a further lead.

Ten years ago, Ethiopia experienced drought and famine. The world said, "Never again." It has happened again. Ten years ago, at the world food conference in Rome, Kissinger said that within a decade no child in the world need go to bed hungry. A decade later we witness children dying and starving for want of food.

Ethiopia and other African countries are hungry for change. That change can come only if we and others provide sufficient development aid to assist agriculture in Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa, so as to enable farmers to grow more food to tackle hunger. If we do not do this we shall find that thousands more die from starvation each and every year.

Any cut in Britain's overseas development budget will be a shortsighted and retrograde step. If anyone asks why we should help to take on the responsibility, the answer is simply that we are, at heart, a Christian people and a Christian nation.

10.25 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am grateful for the opportunity to reinforce the points made by the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry). I shall never forget the sights that I saw last Thursday and Friday in Ethiopia. They will live with me for the remainder of my life.

I plead with the Minister to accept that the Government must make it quite clear, as soon as possible, that the world will produce sufficient grain to meet the needs of Ethiopia. Only 30 per cent. of Ethiopia's requirements have been offered by donor countries. It is essential that the countries with a food surplus should quickly commit themselves to ensuring that the needs of Ethiopia are met.

It is important to ensure that supplies are delivered regularly during the next 12 months and that we do not find that nothing is delivered in one month, which means that the people of Ethiopia will go short for a month.

The tragedy of Ethiopia is that the famine hits the headlines only when the media can show skeletal children on the television screen. There was a drastic famine around Korem in 1965. Some have suggested that one in two people died. Most of us know that in 1973, 250,000 died in Ethiopia because of the famine.

As the hon. Member for Banbury informed us, everyone said that that could never happen again. Yet, 10 years later, it is happening again. I shall be haunted by the fact that in five or six years it could happen again. We must examine the situation in Korem. It is a vast dust-bowl area, yet it could be a productive agricultural region. At Alomata, we have been assured there is an adequate water supply just 17m below the surface which could turn the whole area into a fertile land.

That area is capable of ensuring that, at least in that one area of Ethiopia, no further famines must be endured. It should not be beyond our ability and imagination to ensure that we give sufficient aid to Ethiopia which enables simple pumping and simple drilling to turn it into a food-producing area.

I plead with the Minister to ensure that Ethiopia receives the short-term aid that it needs, that it is delivered in an even flow and, above all, that Britain makes certain that it never happens again. We should never again be faced with the pictures of horror that will haunt us for years to come. We must ensure that we carry out the aid that I have outlined.

10.28 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this important debate. I appreciate the Minister's announcement that he will view the scenes for himself. I asked him to do that early in the year, but he did not think it appropriate.

When the Minister visits Ethiopia, he will see what we are accustomed to seeing on our television screens night after night—the individual horrors. However, he will also see what our screens do not portray, which is the scale of difficulties confronting the people in the 14 affected provinces in Ethiopia and the wider areas of Saharan Africa. The Minister will appreciate that the scale of the disaster is grander and wider than can possibly be portrayed on television.

The position in Ethiopia has been bad for almost 10 years. Indeed, the area has been accustomed to food shortages during that time. I know that during the past two years the Government have taken action to help Tigre and other provinces. I have no doubt that the Minister will return from Ethiopia with the same conclusions as we did —that it is all too little, too late.

The estimates that are made by the Ethiopian Government and the relief agencies suggest that between 7 million and 10 million people are in the drought-affected areas, 43 per cent. of whom are children younger than 14 years of age. The calculation of the relief and rehabilitation commission, which is the Ethiopian Government authority dealing with the crisis, is that 520,000 tonnes of food will be required. That calculation is based on a United Nations figure which has been divided by 50 per cent. I hope that the Minister will bear that figure in mind when he has discussions with the authorities in Ethiopia. As the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) said, the Ethiopian authorities have received only 30 per cent. of the required essential grain commitment to date.

If the statement of the relief and rehabilitation commission that we heard on Saturday is true, there is a possibility that, far from Assab being clogged up, there will be nothing to shift within the next few days if the grain shipments do not arrive. An efficient delivery system is operating from the port and the internal distribution system is well primed with food. The food has been taken from the ports up country to the stores and distribution centres. Unfortunately, further supplies are not on the horizon in supply ships to the extent and in the quantities that are needed. The fear was expressed on Saturday that the grain will not be delivered regularly to enable the excellent efforts of the Royal Air Force to be implemented in moving the grain up country in a regular and orderly manner.

The relief agencies have estimated that about 600,000 tonnes of food supplies will be needed over the next 12 to 18 months. The bulk deliveries that will have to be made will cost a good deal less than the possible cut of £106 million in the budget of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that has been discussed. We do not have to meet the entire cost ourselves, because I think that we should act in concert with our allies in the European Community, America and Australia. However, I think that we should

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

take a lead in delivering the relief from the international community that will prevent the risk of almost 900,000 avoidable deaths. That number of deaths would be intolerable and I hope that the Minister will return from Ethiopia and do everything that he can to prevent avoidable deaths.

10.33 pm

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Timothy Raison): The House has listened carefully to the brief but moving and vivid speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) and the hon. Members for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). I think that everyone will agree that it is right to have the debate. It will be a short debate, but in the quarter of an hour that has passed we have heard some valuable contributions. I shall do my best to answer the questions and respond to the issues that have been raised, but it is not possible to present the full picture within the time imposed by an Adjournment debate.

As the House knows, I hope to go to Ethiopia to see the situation for myself. During my visit I shall meet representatives of the Ethiopian Government and of those who are serving so admirably with the voluntary agencies, the members of our splendid Royal Air Force team and our ambassador and his staff, who are all serving us and the people of Ethiopia extremely well. Most importantly, I shall see for myself the sights that have moved us so deeply in the past few weeks and months.

The debate has been primarily about the need for food and it is that to which I shall address my remarks principally. Before doing so I shall make a few comments about the past, which has been discussed a good deal. It is argued that we have not done enough to help Ethiopia since 1974 and that what we have done both directly and through the multilateral agencies has served only to sustain an iniquitous system and wrong-headed policies. The lack of aid and the supply of it are blamed as contributing to the present disaster.

It is true that we have not felt able to run a full-scale development programme in Ethiopia, and I shall say why. In the troubled province of the Tigré we supported an agricultural development project but, by 1976, difficulties with politics and security—one of our people was shot — made it seem pointless to continue. Ethiopia's agricultural policies brought declining incentives to peasant producers, marketing controls that discouraged production and the allocation of scarce resources to state farms that produced little of the nation's food. There were also human rights problems. We have however continued with what bilateral assistance we could to help with training and the short-term benefits of disaster relief and food aid. Contrary to the impression sometimes given by the media, we have given Ethiopia more help to combat famine in the last few years than we have given to any other country. This has been given as disaster relief, food aid, and our share in food and emergency aid from the Community. The fact remains that the need is dire, and it must be met.

The question of the use of European food surpluses as food aid has been raised, and I think that we all know that it is in the minds of many members of the public. The existence of these food stocks in the European Community naturally leads people to expect a generous response with food aid in emergencies. In the last 12 months, 72,000 tonnes of grain have been delivered under the Community's food aid programme to Ethiopia. A further 10,000 tonnes of grain will arrive next month, and 25,000 tonnes for food for work projects will arrive in two shipments in February and April next year. The House will be pleased to hear also that the Commission announced yesterday a new commitment of 25,000 tonnes which will arrive next month. The Commission is planning now to send an average of 10,000 tonnes a month, including the amounts already pledged, to Ethiopia during 1985.

Inevitably, that aid costs money. It is sometimes said — it was said this morning on the BBC — that it is cheaper to send grain surpluses as food aid than to store them. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury has argued that point, but it is not really true. The grain has been brought into store, but it would normally be sold, as my hon. Friend acknowledged, when market conditions allowed. If the grain is sent as food aid, it is obviously no longer available for sale, and the Community's taxpayers foot the bill. The grain has to be both paid for and shipped, and the internal distribution costs have to be met. In the present circumstances in Ethiopia, donors have to take a major responsibility for the internal as well as foreign exchange costs. The cost of buying and delivering a tonne of grain as food aid from Europe to the famine areas in Ethiopia is £250 — more than 10 times the annual storage cost, which the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food put at £20 a year. The needs of Ethiopia and other drought-affected African countries must be met, but there are substantial costs, and the Community cannot bear the burden alone. I do not think that anyone expects the Community to do so. The United States has recently pledged 130,000 tonnes, the Canadians 80,000 tonnes this year and the Australians 25,000 tonnes. The Community's relief effort must therefore be seen as part of the international response by many donors. The relief commissioner, whom I saw a day or two ago on his way back from the United States, had been profoundly moved by the response in North America. A substantial international effort is being mounted, and that is exactly what is needed.

The World Food Programme reports that arrivals at Assab are subject to some uncertainty, but it puts them provisionally at 61,000 tonnes in December, 53,000 tonnes in January and 57,000 tonnes in February. Forecasts of arrivals at Djibouti and Massawa are not available in any detail, but it is probable that additional supplies, including the additional 25,000 tonnes from the European Community, will arrive through those ports as well as the supplies diverted from Assab. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury has challenged those World Food Programme figures. Obviously, that is something into which I shall look carefully.

I am determined that the momentum generated within the Community will not be lost during the course of next year. I welcome the Commission's intention to continue substantial shipments to Ethiopia throughout 1985. I am pressing for the urgent needs of drought-affected areas to take priority in 1985 over regular food aid programmes and for early decisions on the allocation of the 1985 programme.

I am glad that the aid given by the Community and other Western donors has stimulated the Soviet Union and its allies into providing help, particularly with transport. We

should remember that their provision of military equipment and advice has encouraged the ravages of civil war, which have added to the problems of the region. We do not support the secessionist groups and do not wish to interfere in Ethiopia's politics, but I urge the Ethiopian Government and those who oppose them to set aside their differences and to co-operate in bringing relief to the thousands who face death by starvation. We pledge ourselves to help the Government and people of Ethiopia in this task and to do so in close co-operation with the other donors, multilateral bodies and voluntary agencies who share this objective. The responsibility for co-ordinating these efforts rests largely and inevitably with the Government of Ethiopia and I am glad that the Secretary-General of the United Nations has appointed a co-ordinator to assist them. We wish Mr. Jansson every success in this important work.

Turning to the future, we must look to the multilateral agencies, and in particular the European Community, for the kind of assistance that can help avert further disasters. The pattern of negotiation agreed under the Lomé convention enables the Community to achieve the right context for aid much more effectively than could be done by a single donor. The pragmatic approach taken by the Ethiopean Government to famine relief makes me hope that a similar approach can be adopted to longer-term agricultural development. I understand that the latest discussions between the Government of Ethiopia and the World Bank have shown encouraging signs of that. The problems of Ethiopia have to be seen in the context of famine and the threat of famine elsewhere in the world, especially in Africa. There are many needy people in many countries and the answer is to be found, not in creating new institutions and bureaucracies, but in using most effectively those that we have already.

In closing, let me remind the House of some of the things that we are doing to help Ethiopia in its need. In the last three weeks we have sent Land Rovers and other supplies for the voluntary agencies and tomorrow we shall be flying out mobile workshops for Ethiopia's relief and rehabilitation commission to help it repair vehicles needed to transport food. We are responding quickly to other requests put to us by the commission, recognising the valiant efforts that it is making to get food to the hungry. In the same plane, tomorrow, there will be blankets, plastic sheeting and food kits for distribution by the voluntary agencies to those who are cold and hungry. Hon. Members have referred to the airlift of food and other supplies within Ethiopia by the Royal Air Force. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury said that he hoped the Royal Air Force would be able to stay in Ethiopia until all urgent needs had been met.

As the House is aware, we have agreed to supply two aircraft for three months. We think that, with the two Air Force Hercules, there are enough planes in Ethiopia at present to transport essential food and relief supplies. Keeping two aircraft fully operational in the country also involves the use of five aircraft and 100 men. I believe, from all the reports that I have heard, that our Royal Air Force team is doing a splendid job.

As I said earlier, our help is not limited to Ethiopia. The House will know that I approved recently £250,000 for relief in Chad. That will support a Red Cross feeding project. In addition, I have in the last few days earmarked up to £500,000 for drought relief in the Sudan, much of it for projects identified by British voluntary agencies. We are doing what we can and what is more, we can be sure that our contributions get through to the hungry, and for that I pay a special tribute to the many workers and others who face hardship and danger to achieve this goal.

There are many more things to be said, and many more things will be said in the House about the problem that we are discussing. I hope that nothing I have said has given any impression of complacency. I believe that what has to be done is urgent and extremely important.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: We are all grateful for what the Minister has said and for the fact that he is going out to Ethiopia to see conditions for himself. Will he give us an assurance that as soon as he comes back he will make a statement in the House, assuming that the Leader of the House makes it possible?

Mr. Raison: I shall consider that carefully. As the hon. Gentleman says, it is up to the Leader of the House to determine whether I can make a statement, but I note his point.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): Will my right hon. Friend comment on the reports in the press that much of the effort of some of the multilateral agencies has been wasted because of in-fighting and that there must be a more co-ordinated and friendly effort between them in future if aid is to get through more quickly than at present?

Mr. Raison: I do not think that the in-fighting has been in Ethiopia. It may happen in other places from time to time, and that can be worrying, but my impression is that, given the sudden, enormous surge of activity, the system out there is not working too badly, and I believe that with the addition of a special co-ordinator, and with strengthening in one or two other ways, it will work increasingly well.

We are trying desperately to do the right things. We shall have to keep it up. The problem will not be solved in a week or two We all know that. However, progress is being made in meeting a challenge that is obviously of enormous importance.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 15 November 1984

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Children's Shoes

1. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimated increase in revenue would accrue from levying 15 per cent. value added tax on children's shoes.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Moore): It is estimated that the net additional full year revenue at 1984-85 prices would be about £50 million.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Financial Secretary accept the findings of the Munro committee in 1973, which concluded that there was a causal relationship between the price of children's footwear and the incidence of foot disease? Will he accept that a short-term saving of £50 million makes no sense if it prejudices the longer-term health of the nation's feet? Therefore, will he give the House an assurance that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is not considering imposing VAT on children's footwear?

Mr. Moore: The Government have no reason to doubt the continuing validity of the conclusion reached by the Munro committee. I know that the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to say more than the Minister of State, Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Hayhoe), said on 25 October, which was that we had no set views at present on how the Government might shift the burden of taxation from taxes on earnings to taxes on spending.

Mrs. Jill Knight: Will my hon. Friend accept that there is considerable worry on both sides of the House about the possibility of VAT being levied on children's shoes? Will he recognise that the present system, which does not impose VAT on shoes that help developing feet, has certainly made a contribution to the health of children's feet?

Mr. Moore: I recognise the point made by my hon. Friend. I notice that she has put her name to early-day motion 109, which has been signed by hon. Members of all parties. I certainly take note of my hon. Friend's views.

Mr. Fatchett: Will the Financial Secretary tell us how many jobs would be lost in the boot and shoe industry as a result of the imposition of VAT?

Mr. Moore: The Government are aware of the concern expressed by United Kingdom manufacturers of boots and shoes. They have said that the imposition of VAT could lead to a diminution of employment. That is the view of the manufacturers. The Government have listened to them and are aware of that view.

Mr. Jessel: Is my hon. Friend aware that those of us who, 12 years ago, discouraged the then Chancellor of the Exchequer from taxing children's shoes have had no reason to change our minds and that we accept the argument that tight shoes for children can cause deformed feet for life? However, is my hon. Friend aware that that argument did not, and does not, apply to other clothing?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend's independence of spirit is appreciated, not only by his constituents, but by the Government. I recognise the consistency with which he has expressed his views and we always take account of the views of all hon. Members on these issues.

Mr. Blair: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Britain is almost unique in Europe in having a proper fitting service for shoes, which greatly contributes to the health care of our children? Does he realise that the uncertainty is undermining confidence in the industry and whetting the appetite of foreign producers of less good footwear? If the Government are not prepared to support British industry in the interests of our children, when are they prepared to support it?

Mr. Moore: I hope that it is not inappropriate for me to congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his first appearance at the Dispatch Box. I hope that that will not create too much difficulty for him in his future career. However, I know that he will not expect me to accept the kind of nonsense with which he has started.

Public Debt

2. **Mr. Wainwright** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent the trend of public debt interest is higher than his forecast of March.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): "The Autumn Statement 1984" gives estimated figures for debt interest in 1984-85 and 1985-86 which are respectively about £½ billion and £1 billion above previous estimates.

Mr. Wainwright: As the Chancellor of the Exchequer has referred not only to the autumn uprating of the current debt estimate but to the estimate for 1985-86, which is stretching a long way ahead, how does he explain his recent statement that the prospect is of further interest rate cuts? Will the right hon. Gentleman say something about interest rates to reassure British industry?

Mr. Lawson: I can deal with the hon. Gentleman's puzzlement quite simply. The increase in the estimates to which I referred is an increase over what was envisaged at the the time of the last Budget. When I say that I now see a prospect of interest rates falling, I am talking about falling from their present levels. I am glad to say that that prospect remains as a result of this Government's policies.

Sir William Clark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that as the national debt increases year by year because of overspending, interest charges will obviously increase? As the interest payments on the national debt are now more than £45 million per day, would it not be folly to increase our public expenditure now?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is quite right. It would be folly to increase public expenditure now, and that is

why the Government have no intention of doing so. It is a quite remarkable fact that, despite the miners' strike and the events in the United States, where interest rates have risen sharply, the level of interest rates in Britain is no higher than it was at the time of the last general election, and is set to go lower.

Privatisation

3. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the impact on the economy of the privatisation programme.

Mr. Moore: Privatisation helps the economy by giving companies the freedom and the challenge of the market place. This greatly benefits their customers, their employees, and the nation.

Mr. Howarth: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that British Aerospace is a fine example of the benefits of privatisation, with record sales and profits? Will he take forward with enthusiasm that programme of genuine public ownership?

Mr. Moore: I fully endorse what my hon. Friend said. British Aerospace is a classic example, because it is winning major orders against fierce international competition. My hon. Friend will know from the latest published accounts that the turnover of British Aerospace is up 62 per cent. A higher turnover produces higher profits and increased investment, and increases the number of jobs, which is something that I suspect all hon. Members want.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Is it not bizarre that the Labour party, which calls for increased public ownership of wealth and assets, should at the same time refuse to support denationalisation in the form, for example, of the sale of council houses or shares in British Telecom, when that is the most effective way of giving individual members of our society a genuine stake in the national wealth?

Mr. Moore: I have difficulty in understanding what is not bizarre about the Labour party's policies. My hon. Friend will realise that the employees of industries which were once nationalised but are now in the private sector have become owners as well as earners and are committed to their success, and that that suggests that the Opposition are divorced from the real views of the majority of the electorate as expressed at the last election.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Why have the Government not taken the opportunity with British Airways and British Telecom to increase competition so that the consumer, rather than just the Treasury, benefits? Did not the Government back down when they had the opportunity of bringing about greater competition in civil aviation because the interests of the Treasury were put first?

Mr. Moore: It is quite the reverse. We are delighted to have any support for privatisation from the alliance parties, recognising that privatisation will give competition. We trust that the alliance parties will look at how new regulatory structures seek to aid that competition by helping the consumer, not the politician.

Dr. McDonald: Is the Minister aware that the main privatisation sales have so far brought £1·9 billion to the Exchequer, which is £450 million less than the shares are now worth and that it represents an opportunity cost to the Government? After all, if the Government had invested that money in the infrastructure, it would have been better used to create 100,000 new jobs.

Mr. Moore: The reality is perfectly expressed by the hon. Lady, in the sense that those companies have done much better in the private sector. Freed from the dead hand of state, the turnover of Cable and Wireless is up by 122 per cent., of Amersham by 80 per cent., of British Aerospace by 62 per cent., of Britoil by 44 per cent., and of National Freight by 14 per cent. Those successes are shared by the employees as well as by the market place. Instead of sticking to their Clause Four commitments, Opposition Members should try to discuss these issues with the employees of denationalised industries.

Income Tax

5. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate at what income level a family of average size would begin to pay less tax, both direct and indirect, than they would have done in 1979.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Ian Stewart): Families with earnings above about half the average will now be paying a smaller proportion of their earnings in income tax than in 1978-79. The amount paid in indirect taxes depends, of course, on individual spending patterns.

Mr. Lloyd: I am grateful to the Minister for not answering my question. Perhaps I can try to help him. Does he agree, not with me, but with the present Foreign Secretary, who said in 1979 that the basic rate of tax plus of course national insurance contributions had the deterrent effect of a tax on earnings? — [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] I would not want to misrepresent the Foreign Secretary. Does the Minister agree that even a family on double the average earnings, at 1983-84 prices, is paying about £110 in national insurance contributions and income tax this year although they were paying less than £90 in 1978-79? There has been a £10 increase even in indirect taxation and only the very rich have gained.

Mr. Stewart: Allowing for inflation since 1978-79, the married man on average earnings is now paying £4 a week less than under Labour in its last year in office. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary was absolutely right in 1979 to point to the excessive burden of income tax and the high basic rate.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Has not the autumn statement given some leeway for tax cuts in the spring? Will the Government consider carefully the merits of raising tax thresholds yet again, as they have for the last two years? If tax thresholds are raised, that will give a greater incentive to people to work. Does my hon. Friend agree that taxes start at far too low a level?

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend's remarks will have been heard by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The tax threshold has been far too low. I am glad to say that in real terms under this Government in the last five years the threshold has been increased by 16 per cent. in real terms. That is an important achievement.

Mr. Blair: Will the Minister please confirm in plain terms that, after deducting income tax and national

insurance contributions, since this Government took office people have had to earn over £18,000 a year to have less to pay and more to spend.

Mr. Stewart: The Opposition continually confuse percentages of tax paid. I thought that the Opposition believed that as earnings rose the percentage of tax paid should rise. Disposable income per head has risen by 6 per cent. under this Government. That takes into account all the tax, deductions and the cost of indirect taxes borne in prices.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I sense that the mood of the House is that we should have shorter questions and answers.

Economic Progress

6. **Mr. Straw** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is satisfied with the progress of the economy in terms of national output and employment.

7. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is satisfied with the progress of the economy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lawson: Output has been rising at a rate of 2½ per cent. per annum since the trough of the recession. Employment has risen by an estimated ¼ million over the year to June and is expected to continue to rise. But had real wages grown less rapidly, employment would be rising still faster and unemployment would not now be rising at all.

Mr. Straw: Is the Chancellor aware that his answer shows a staggering complacency about the state of Britain's economy? Is he aware that in 1979 our performance on inflation and unemployment was average among the major seven OECD countries? Our performance on inflation is still average, but our performance on unemployment and manufacturing output is worse than that of any of our major competitors. When does he believe that manufacturing output will return to its 1979 level, since it is 10 per cent. behind that level now?

Mr. Lawson: There is general interest throughout the House in making comparisons with other countries. Since the election, and on the latest available figures our unemployment rose, I regret, by 3·7 per cent., but unemployment rose by 5·2 per cent. in the remainder of the Community. The number of jobs in Britain rose by 1 per cent., but there was no increase in the remainder of the Community. Britain's gross domestic product rose by 2·9 per cent., compared with only 1·5 per cent. in the remainder of the Community.

Mr. Forman: Although I welcome the encouraging sustained increase in output under this Government during recent years, does my right hon. Friend accept that if we are to create sufficient new jobs to counteract the inexorable rise in unemployment we must put greater emphasis in the forthcoming Budget on finding ways to lower industrial costs, which will facilitate that process?

Mr. Lawson: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that the next Budget — as was the last Budget, with the abolition of the national insurance surcharge and the reform of corporation tax and business taxation generally — must be framed to encourage the creation of new jobs. That is of the first importance. That is why reductions in taxation, and especially direct taxation, are so important.

Mr. Dormand: When will the Chancellor stop giving credence to the myth that public borrowing in Britain is dangerously high? Britain's 3 per cent. of GDP compares with 4·5 per cent. in other industrial countries. Is it not abundantly clear that such a tight fiscal policy is the major cause of Britain having 4 million unemployed? When will the Chancellor take off his blinkers and recognise the disastrous effect of those policies on the people of Britain?

Mr. Lawson: Britain does not have 4 million unemployed, I am glad to say. The recovery that we are now seeing—*[Interruption.]* The facts are unpalatable to Opposition Members. The recovery began when my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary very courageously made a major reduction in the borrowing requirement in the 1981 Budget.

Mr. John Townend: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one way to increase employment is to remove restriction and rigidities in the labour market and allow market forces to work? Is it not time that we did away with such bodies as wages councils and the National Dock Labour Board?

Mr. Lawson: Obviously we shall be looking seriously at the question of wages councils.

Mr. Hattersley: Does the Chancellor recall that from time to time he has favoured such organisations as election press conferences and the Leicester young farmers with his estimates for unemployment during the next year? Will he now do the same for the House of Commons?

Mr. Lawson: I made it clear earlier this week—but perhaps the right hon. Gentleman was not paying attention — that everything that the Government are doing is designed to create maximum opportunities for new jobs. I have not made forecasts about unemployment in the past and I do not propose to do so now.

Interest Rates

9. **Dr. Marek** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average level of real interest rates since May 1979; and what was the average level of real interest rates during the previous five years.

Mr. Ian Stewart: There is no precise practical definition of real interest rates.

Dr. Marek: I cannot really thank the Minister for his non-answer—he could have done better. Does he accept that, because of need or policy, the Government have had a high level of interest rates since they took office? We have often heard the Chancellor say that interest rates are set to fall.

What is the difference between Britain and Germany, which, under a Conservative Government, has an economy which is generally run much better than Britain's, and whose interest rates are only half of Britain's?

Mr. Stewart: It so happens that during the 1980s real rates of interest in the United Kingdom have tended to be below those in Germany and the United States. Precise calculations are not possible, as it is necessary to make estimates of future inflation. Under the last Labour

Government the average annual rate was 15 per cent. Under the previous Consevative Administration the average decreased to 10 per cent., and it is much lower now. That is the best way in which to reduce real and nominal interest rates.

Mr. Hordern: As the level of interest rates was rather higher under the last Labour Government than it is now, is not the effect of the supplementary question of the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), on which he is to be congratulated, to draw attention to that Labour Government's appalling record on inflation and to my right hon. Friend's rather good record in this respect?

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is right. I have no doubt that companies in industry and commerce would greatly prefer lower interest rates and lower inflation than higher interest rates and higher inflation under a Labour Government.

Dr. McDonald: If the Minister is unable to define real interest rates, how can he provide interesting comparisons with Germany? Is it not a fact that whatever interest rate is chosen and whatever definition of real interest rate is selected, the rate was zero or negative under the previous Labour Government and has been strongly positive under Conservative Administrations since 1979? Will the Minister accept that this has been detrimental both to house owners and manufacturing industry?

Mr. Stewart: I was asked a precise question by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), to which I gave a precise answer. Inflation was much higher under the last Labour Government than it has been under the Conservative Government. I am sure that industry and investors prefer to have lower rates of inflation and lower interest rates. Lower real rates of interest cheat savers and deny investors a proper return on their investment. If the record which the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) is claiming for the Labour Government, whom she supported in the 1970s, suggests that it is better to have high rates of inflation and negative real rates of interest, I profoundly disagree with her.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

10. **Mr. Wrigglesworth** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the public sector borrowing requirement for 1984-85.

Mr. Lawson: Approximately £8½ billion.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: As we now have the lowest percentage public sector borrowing requirement in Europe and the highest level of unemployment, will the Government direct any adjustments that are made in the tax system towards reducing the cost of labour and increasing the level of employment by, for instance, reducing car tax? Will the Government consider much more sympathetically the CBI's proposals for investment in infrastructure, which would have a much more direct impact upon levels of employment?

Mr. Lawson: The hon. Gentleman has asked a curious string of questions. He is wrong about the level of employment. Unemployment, although too high in the United Kingdom, is even higher in a number of other European countries. Secondly, the effect on unemployment of investment in the infrastructure would be slight even in the short term. Infrastructure projects have to be decided on their merits—for example, whether they will earn a proper rate of return. If they will produce that return, they should go ahead. As I have said, I shall frame my next Budget firmly with a view to what, in my judgment, will offer the best prospects of lower inflation and rising employment.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend accept that we all agree that the PSBR is important, as is keeping down Government borrowing? Does he agree that there would be a danger in directing indirect taxation to energy costs, so raising energy costs to industry and stultifying the recovery that is now taking place in industry?

Mr. Lawson: I know that my hon. Friend will be pleased to be reassured that there is no question of any form of tax on energy.

Mr. John Morris: How does the Chancellor's recent statement that this has been another good year affect the more than 5,000 unemployed in my constituency, particularly those who have been unemployed for a long time?

Mr. Lawson: I share the right hon. and learned Gentleman's concern for those who are out of work. The plain facts are that the vast majority of the people in work are enjoying record living standards, that output is at all-time record levels and that fixed investment is running at an all-time high. I wish that Opposition Members would give a balanced picture of the economy. The Government are ready to acknowledge the acute problems of high unemployment, and we make no secret of that. The Opposition, however, show no readiness to acknowledge that anything could conceivably be going right in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maples: Has the projected over-run in this year's PSBR had any effect on interest rates?

Mr. Lawson: It is fairly clear that interest rates are higher than they would otherwise have been. As my hon. Friend will be aware, interest rates went up particularly sharply in July. We have been able to regain most of the lost ground, but interest rates are still higher than they should be. I hope that, before long, they will come down further.

Mr. Terry Davis: If the Chancellor can increase this year's PSBR by £1·5 billion to fight the miners, why does he refuse to increase next year's PSBR by the same amount to provide jobs for the unemployed?

Mr. Lawson: I think that most people reckon that the cost of keping the power stations going, despite the miners' strike, is well worth incuring. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman will have to wait until my next Budget to discover what will be done to next year's PSBR. The Government's policy of progressively reducing the PSBR as a percentage of GDP is one which we shall continue and one by which we have secured a continuing fall in inflation and a continuing recovery.

Imports

11. **Sir Anthony Meyer** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the likly effect on imports of any reductions in personal taxation.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Peter Rees): The effects will depend on assumptions about other

developments in the economy. But lower personal taxation should help to create a more vigorous and competitive economy, better able to supply the goods and services which consumers demand.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Is it not a fact that cuts in personal taxation, which inevitably extend all the way up the range, are likely to give increased purchasing power to people who are likely to buy expensive foreign imports such as Japanese goods?

Mr. Rees: My hon. Friend must take account of the fact that any tax cuts which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor may feel able to introduce are firmly within the medium-term financial strategy, and therefore will not be inflationary in their impact. My hon. Friend will take account of the fact—I know that he is interested in these matters—that exports to Europe have not suffered, but have increased since 1979 by about 79 per cent.

Mr. Wigley: Surely the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) is right in believing that, if there is an increase in disposable income at the higher income levels, there is a real danger of that income being spent on overseas holidays and that sort of thing, thereby losing potential jobs in the economy. At the same time, a cut in public expenditure to facilitate that taxation reduction loses jobs in the economy. Surely that does not solve the unemployment problem.

Mr. Rees: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that, for example, total fixed investment last year was at its highest level. This year, investment in manufacturing is likely to increase by 12 per cent. and investment in service industries is likely to increase by 8 per cent. Further increases are likely next year. That is the best possible augury of employment increases.

Mr. Dickens: Is it not a fact that this nation is too highly taxed? Is it not also a fact that, if we leave more money in people's pockets, they purchase more products, which leads to more jobs?

Mr. Rees: My hon. Friend is right. According to the evidence, there is not a shortage of demand. The kind of tax cuts introduced have increased demand, with exactly the consequences outlined by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Wareing: Because the tax reductions will aid mainly the richer section of the community, are not their effects likely to be an increase in unemployment, deprivation for more people in the community, and no change to imports?

Mr. Rees: The hon. Gentleman is inaccurate. Far more money has been devoted to raising thresholds than has ever been devoted to reducing higher rates.

Taxation

12. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current level and distribution of taxation.

Mr. Moore: The current burden of taxation is still too high. It is my right hon. Friend's intention to reduce it.

Mr. Leigh: Will not the estimated £1·5 billion of tax cuts portended by the autumn statement be a much more effective way of creating jobs than the estimated extra £4 billion which would have had to be taken from the job-creating private tax-paying sector if the rates of tax inherited from the Labour Government had remained unchanged.

Mr. Moore: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Minister accept that the Tory party philosophy from 1979 onwards has been to try to encourage the entrepreneur, through lower taxes at the higher levels, to provide jobs? Does he accept that this has failed, and that it has failed no more dismally than in the City where Johnson Matthey, the gold bullion dealers, were unable to sustain their reserves and have been bailed out by the Government to the tune of £75 million? Does that not prove that the whole of the Tory party philosophy —to support the entrepreneurs, and market forces—has failed miserably?

Mr. Moore: No, Sir. That is inaccurate. The Government were not involved in the sense that the Bank of England was involved. To the extent that the Government's tax policies have sought to reduce the burden on employers, which I gather was wanted by both sides of the House, the Government first had to reduce the £4 billion-plus increase in employer taxation which occurred between 1974 and 1979 through NIC and NIS, which has now already been reduced by £3 billion and which I should have thought was an added incentive to job creation.

Community Budget

13. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is satisfied with the progress made in reforming the structure of the Common Market budget; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Fontainebleau agreement represented a significant achievement and good progress has been made on the detailed provisions for implementation.

Mr. Taylor: Why does my hon. Friend think it necessary to increase the Common Market's public spending by over £3 billion a year in real terms? Does he appreciate that it makes it rather more difficult for Back Benchers to explain to their constituents why it is necessary to have real cuts in the provision for housing, student grants and foreign aid if we are to pour more money into the Common Market, which is spending over £100 million every week on dumping, storing or destroying surplus food?

Mr. Stewart: I do not expect our contribution to the European Community over the next few years, on average, to be greater than it has been in the recent past. The important factor for the United Kingdom in any agreement to increase the amount of resources available to the Community is that we shall have in place a system of abatement which keeps our contribution below 1 per cent. of VAT own resources, while the level of contribution of all other member states will be above that figure.

Mr. Forth: Does my hon. Friend agree that if we cannot obtain a satisfactory budgetary mechanism to control expenditure we shall be unable to agree to an increase in Community resources?

Mr. Stewart: The Economic and Finance Ministers in council on Monday of this week agreed a common position on budgetary discipline which meets the British Government's objectives.

Investment

14. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is satisfied with the current level of manufacturing investment.

16. **Mr. Robert B. Jones** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is satisfied with the level of investment in the economy.

Mr. Lawson: Yes. Total fixed investment this year is expected to be an all-time record. In the first half of 1984 manufacturing investment was up 15 per cent. on a year earlier.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that should lead to extra and more secure jobs in manufacturing industry?

Mr. Lawson: Yes, Sir. It is of vital importance that we have profitable investment for the future development of the economy. That is why I am particularly glad that all the indications are that there will be a further good year for fixed industrial investment in 1985.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I accept my right hon. Friend's encouraging figures, but is he not aware that there is widespread concern in the construction industry that the level of investment is not affecting it in the same way as the rest of the economy?

Mr. Lawson: I am aware of the concern in the construction industry. I am also aware that what the construction industry wants to see above all is lower interest rates because, of all industries, it is perhaps the most interest-rate sensitive. That is why the Government's policy of creating the conditions in which interest rates can come down still further is of such importance. The recent rise in the mortgage rate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Fall."]—is an indicator most welcome to the whole House, and not least to the construction industry.

Dr. Bray: Is the Chancellor of the Exchequer aware that manufacturing investment in the first half of 1984 was still 29 per cent. below the 1979 level?

Mr. Lawson: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman, unlike his right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), gets his statistics right. That is absolutely correct, but the fact of the matter is that total fixed investment in the economy this year is at an all-time high.

Mr. Evans: Will the Chancellor confirm that, notwithstanding the level of investment in manufacturing industry, the Treasury confidently expects employment in the manufacturing sector to fall? Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, while we have 3,250,000 benefit claimants, there are over 4 million unemployed, many of whom used to work in manufacturing industry?

Mr. Lawson: On the contrary, manufacturing investment is on a clearly rising trend. The latest figures for manufacturing employment show that it, too, now appears to have stabilised. The House will be aware that employment in manufacturing has been rising steadily since the middle 1960s.

Interest Rates

15. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the current level of interest rates.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Interest rates remain on a downward trend.

Mr. Hirst: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. While welcoming the recent fall in interest rates, may I ask him whether he agrees that interest rates in Britain and elsewhere in the world would be lower were it not for the colossal budget deficit in the United States? Does my hon. Friend further agree that the rapid reversal of interest rates since July's increase confirms that the Government were right to stick to their strategy?

Mr. Stewart: I agree with my hon. Friend that a reduction in the budget deficit in the United States would be welcome, particularly because it would help to ease the burden on interest rates around the world, especially in Third world countries. A 1 per cent. cut in interest rates would lead to a reduction of nearly $2 billion in interest payments for non-oil developing countries. I welcome the reduction since July, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor predicted, contrary to the Leader of the Opposition's views at the time, which were that the rate rise was a disaster of immense proportions. If that three-month move in interest rates was a disaster of immense proportions, the right hon. Gentleman cannot have very much to complain about.

Job Creation

17. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the economic recovery is creating new jobs.

Mr. Lawson: The number of people in work is estimated to have risen by about ¼ million in the year to June 1984 and I expect it to continue rising in 1985.

Mr. Eggar: Given the expected growth rate and the increase in the number of people of working age, does my right hon. Friend think it likely that unemployment will fall in the course of this Parliament, and what additional measures does he intend to take to ensure that it does?

Mr. Lawson: As I have said many times, the Government's economic policy is designed to create conditions which will allow more new jobs to emerge. Governments do not directly create jobs. Business and industry create jobs. Our task is to create a climate in which they can create the new jobs that are needed, and that is what we are doing.

Mr. Douglas: Few of us would grudge the Chancellor any crumb of comfort in relation to the economy, but as he takes that credit against a background of established regional policy, especially in relation to regional development grants, why do the Government wish to interfere with a policy that is bringing even a microscopic amount of success?

Mr. Lawson: The new regional development grant policy to be announced later this month will, among other things, be more job-related than the existing system.

Mr. Yeo: Does my right hon. Friend agree that to the extent that the miners' strike has retarded economic recovery this year, Arthur Scargill has been destroying other workers' jobs?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is quite right. Mr. Scargill has destroyed jobs in a number of industries, both directly and indirectly, by causing interest rates to be higher than they otherwise would be. He is also threatening the whole future of the coal industry, so the sooner the strike is over, the better.

Mr. Hattersley: The Chancellor has refused to respond to invitations from both sides to estimate unemployment levels during this Parliament. Will he now deny the generally held view that, with present policies, there will be no significant fall in unemployment during this Parliament?

Mr. Lawson: I do not intend to make any assertion about unemployment in the lifetime of this Parliament. I recall that when the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was a Minister he, too, studiously refrained from making forecasts about unemployment in the lifetime of a Parliament.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Marlow: Does my right hon. Friend share the pride of the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) in the breed of men who man our pits? As it now appears that the House, the nation and a growing number of miners have had enough of the dispute in the coalfields, will my right hon. Friend do all that she can to heal the wounds caused by eight months of bitterness, violence and Scargillism?

The Prime Minister: I welcome the condemnations of violence in the past few days, but I regret that they are not universal. When the strike ends—and I hope that it will end soon—we shall have to do as much as we possibly can to build on moderate, responsible, reasonable and constructive trade unionism.

Mr. James Callaghan: Is the Prime Minister aware that she will be meeting the wishes of both sides of the House if she asks the Cabinet to reconsider the entire Foreign Office Vote—for overseas aid, representation, the overseas news service and the British Council, all of which are so important for our influence overseas—and comes back to the House with a new statement and fresh proposals?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman will be the first to recognise, when one has considered and finalised all the PESC figures it is highly unlikely that any one of them can be reopened. Indeed, I must really say that they cannot be reopened. Having seen the autumn statement, however, the right hon. Gentleman will be aware that only two Departments have precisely the figure for the coming year which they knew they would have from the last White Paper. One is the Foreign Office. The other is the Ministry of Defence. If the right hon. Gentleman will contain his impatience a little longer, it is possible that there may be a debate on this next week, when the matter can be discussed more fully.

Coal Industry Dispute

Q2. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Prime Minister what steps she proposes taking to help alleviate the social and economic consequences of the coal mining strike.

The Prime Minister: The Government have already provided the financial support so that the National Coal Board is able to offer the miners a good wage increase, a guarantee that any miner who wishes to continue in the industry will be able to do so, an investment programme that will enable the industry to improve its productivity and increase its markets, and the creation of a new enterprise company to bring new businesses to mining communities.

Two of the three unions in the coal industry as well as one third of the members of the National Union of Mineworkers have already accepted the National Coal Board's offer. Since the beginning of last week more than 6,500 miners have returned to work. I hope that those remaining on strike will follow their example.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Prime Minister aware that the great solidarity shown in Wales with the coal miners arises from people's fears that communities will be wiped off the face of the map if mines close in those communities? Is she further aware that their experience so far of the Government's efforts to bring jobs to valley communities in south Wales gives people no great confidence? Trying to starve miners back to work will not solve the basic problems that caused the strike, but will only add to the bitterness. When will the Government cease the abdication of their responsibilities and start to bring harmony instead of discord?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that uneconomic pits have had to close for a very long time. That was right, as it is the duty of the National Coal Board to run the industry efficiently and to develop it efficiently. It was always understood that closures of uneconomic pits were covered in the colliery review procedure.

There are some miners at work in pits in Wales, as the hon. Gentleman knows, and I hope that the numbers will increase, because I believe that many, many people within the industry, as well as my hon. Friends, want the situation to get back to normal as soon as possible. They want to earn good money and see the necessary decisions made. We must then work very hard on the enterprise company to try to bring new work to the mining communities.

Mr. Bellingham: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the GLC proposals for banning heavy lorries have far-reaching and damaging effects on small businesses——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) has failed to notice that this is a specific question about the coal mining industry.

Mr. Kinnock: In view of her record, the Prime Minister's answer to her hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) will be regarded both inside and outside the House as complete humbug. If the right hon. Lady genuinely wants to see a speedy end to the

dispute and subsequent harmony in the coalfields and elsewhere, will she intervene now to ensure that the cut-back in production of 4 million tonnes is withdrawn, as reality has made it redundant, and also to ensure that the colliery review procedure is fully restored in line with "Plan for Coal"?

The Prime Minister: I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman any lessons on humbug. What he has said from that Dispatch Box shows that he is a self-appointed expert on the subject. At the beginning of the strike he spoke about a ballot, but we then heard virtually nothing about that until a few days ago. It took a highly distinguished trade unionist to condemn violence at a mass meeting of the National Union of Mineworkers before the right hon. Gentleman echoed the sentiments from a safe distance. He did not have the guts to go and do it himself. The right hon. Gentleman knows that the National Coal Board has always honoured the colliery review procedure. I do not know why he continually asks that question. He is well aware that the settlement reached between the NCB and NACODS was an excellent one. It is on the table, and I hope that it will be picked up by those miners who are still on strike.

Mr. Kinnock: Once again in this dispute the right hon. Lady is dodging into incidentals. On the question of meetings, will she meet the leadership of the NUM to explain—[HON. MEMBERS: "The right hon. Gentleman will not."]

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a question of great importance to the House and, I think, to the country too.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the right hon. Lady meet the leadership of the miners' trade union to explain how, after eight months, during which she has allowed the cost of the dispute to increase to £3,000 million, she can sustain the idea that the hit list should stay and that no other changes should be made? How can she still tell the country that she wants a peaceful end to the dispute?

The Prime Minister: I urge the right hon. Gentleman to examine the NACODS' settlement, where he will find the answer. He knows full well that all the five named pits will go through the colliery review procedure, as enhanced by the NACODS' settlement. It is for the National Coal Board and those who are on strike to come to a settlement, as the board did with NACODS. Will the right hon. Gentleman urge the miners to return to work?

Sir Anthony Grant: Despite the excellent financial arrangements that are properly being made for the miners by the NCB, does my right hon. Friend recognise the enormous courage that is required to return to work in the face of appalling intimidation—something that is alien to this country? Will she especially say a word of praise for the fact that the lead in returning to work has been given by Derbyshire and Bolsover?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir. Of course, Nottinghamshire has had people back at work for some time. The return to work in Derbyshire and Bolsover has been excellent. I join my hon. Friend in admiring the bravery of those who have crossed violent picket lines to return to work. Many miners would have returned to work but for the fact that, in many places, the strike is being maintained by violence. I hope that they, too, will accept the invitation to return to work.

Dr. Owen: Are not the squeaks of the Leader of the Labour party and other Labour leaders in recent days, as they seek to distance themselves from Arthur Scargill, reminiscent of the squeaks of rats leaving the sinking ship? [*Interruption.*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. Such a response only takes time from other hon. Members.

Dr. Owen: Far from taking lessons from the Artful Dodger, will the Prime Minister make it clear that there will be no question of reopening negotiations on the NACODS' settlement?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the National Coal Board can move no further.

Mr. Concannon: My views on violence and intimidation have been on the record for a long time. In her Guildhall speech earlier this week the Prime Minister implied that the miners who had been working during the strike, and those who had returned to work, agreed with her, her Government's policies or with Mr. MacGregor. I assure her that they do not. The argument in Nottinghamshire—it is the only area for which I can speak—is a constitutional one; not one that implies recognition of her policies or those of the NCB.

The Prime Minister: I made no such assertion. Many of the miners who returned to work did so because they believe, rightly, that they are standing up for democracy. Secondly, they are showing loyalty to the industry and ensuring that the industry's customers obtain security of supply. Thirdly, they are doing what most of us wish to do—earning an honest living to keep their families.

Engagements

Q3. **Mr. Marland** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Q4. **Mr. Neil Hamilton** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hamilton: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the movement back to work in the car factories and the mines shows how dangerously out of touch extreme Left-wing trade union members are with their members? Does she further agree that, far from tightening the noose around the nation's neck, as the extreme Left wingers intend, they are tightening it around their own necks, as Mr. Norman Willis discovered to his discomfiture?

The Prime Minister: I was delighted that there was such a forthright condemnation of violence by the General-Secretary of the TUC. I agree that if industries go on strike they will lose customers and jobs. That is the weakness of the Opposition's case, when they talk about unemployment, but support every strike that destroys existing jobs.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Prime Minister now aware that she misled the House on Tuesday and that the pay-outs from the Secretary of State for Transport for those whom he sacked from the London Transport board were the

responsibility of the Secretary of State, and not of the GLC? Is she further aware that the proposed 6,000 redundancies on London Regional Transport will cost the taxpayers £36 million? How will that assist travellers in London?

The Prime Minister: The size of the compensation is related to the length of the remaining term of office. The GLC appointed these members for five years, when it already knew that its control of London Transport would shortly be coming to an end. That was thoroughly irresponsible, but compensation is related to that period, and had the size of the compensation been anything less my right hon. Friend could have been taken to court to give proper compensation.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House whether he will state the business of the House for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 19 NOVEMBER—Second reading of the Films Bill. Motions on the Gas Catalytic Heaters Regulations and on the Legal Aid and Advice Orders for England and Wales, and for Scotland.

TUESDAY 20 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the New Towns and Urban Development Corporation Bill. Remaining stages of the Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 21 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Civil Aviation Bill. Motions on the Social Security Orders on contributions, re-rating and Treasury supplement.

THURSDAY 22 NOVEMBER — Opposition day (2nd Allotted Day). There will be a debate on public expenditure on overseas aid, on a motion in the name of the leader of the Liberal party. Remaining stages of the Friendly Societies Bill.

FRIDAY 23 NOVEMBER—A debate on the report of the Warnock committee on human fertilisation and embryology, Cmnd. 9314, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 26 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Social Security Bill.

Mr. Kinnock: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his statement. I remind him of his reply to me last week, in which he assured me and the House that the debates on Monday and Tuesday of this week on the Queen's Speech would not supersede the usual full day's debate on the Chancellor's autumn statement. Can he confirm not only that we shall have that debate, but that we shall have it before the end of the month, as I asked last week? Will the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance that we shall have, in Government time — this is a Government responsibility—a debate on "The Rate Limitation Report 1984", a copy of which was laid before the House as long ago as last July?

Mr. Biffen: I am happy to confirm the intention to have a debate upon the autumn statement. I note the right hon. Gentleman's preferred timing and I am sympathetic to his request, but perhaps we should consider this further through the usual channels.

I note also the right hon. Gentleman's concern that there should be a debate on the rate limitation report. This can be seen in the context of the rate support grant, but we can talk about timing through the usual channels.

Mr. Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): Can my right hon. Friend explain the indecent haste for the Civil Aviation Bill? It was printed on Friday, and apparently it is to have its Second Reading next Wednesday. Can he explain to some of us who are rather suspicious about the motives of the Bill why it is being pushed through in this rushed way? Many of us feel that it will be a boost for Stansted and against the provincial airports. If it is true that the report on Stansted is to be announced on Thursday, why are we having the Second Reading debate on the Bill on Wednesday?

Mr. Biffen: I am anxious to assure my hon. Friend that the Civil Aviation Bill stands in its own right and is quite unconnected with the wider issue of Stansted, which will be the subject of an inspector's report and a Government comment on that which in due course will be considered by the House. I hope that when the time comes for Wednesday's Second Reading debate my hon. Friend will have a chance to take part and have his fears assuaged.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On next Thursday's business, will the Leader of the House ensure that the Foreign Secretary gives a precise and unambiguous statement of the implications of the announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer for overseas aid and other related aspects of the Foreign Office budget? Will any statement be informed by some further Cabinet discussion before then?

Mr. Biffen: All Foreign Office statements are precise and unambiguous, and I have no doubt that next Thursday will provide no exception to that rule. To reassure the hon. Gentleman, I shall make certain that his remarks are referred to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is widespread concern in all parts of the House about the decision to discuss the Warnock report on a Friday, when most right hon. and hon. Members are performing their duties in their constituencies? Will he consider rearranging the date for this debate, which is a very important one for all right hon. and hon. Members?

Mr. Biffen: It will be a sad day for Parliament when Fridays are so devalued that this kind of topic cannot be debated on a Friday. If it is of the importance that my hon. Friend suggests—and I believe that it is—right hon. and hon. Members will make it their duty to be here.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): Will the Leader of the House take note that in respect of Tuesday's proposed business there are a great many detailed and difficult matters to be considered during the Committee stage of the Bill and that it will also be necessary to have a Third Reading debate, even if the Government have not seen fit to make amendments to the Bill in Committee?

Mr. Biffen: I shall bear in mind those ominous words. If we cannot make the necessary progress, we shall have to consider additional time.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): In my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Mr. Montgomery), he said that there was no connection between the Stansted report and the Civil Aviation Bill. Will he explain, therefore, why he is proceeding with such indecent haste? In July, the Civil Aviation Authority produced a 68-page report on civil aviation. The Government responded to that on 5 October with their White Paper. There has been no debate on the White Paper. Within three days of the opening of Parliament, the Civil Aviation Bill had its First Reading, and seven days later it is to have its Second Reading. What is my right hon. Friend up to?

Mr. Biffen: To the rather tedious business of announcing next week's business, which is of an unexceptional character, and of having a Bill presented which has observed all the normal courtesies related to its

timing, and to try to persuade my hon. Friend that there is nothing sinister about it. It provides an opportunity for a reasonable and constructive debate on Wednesday, which I hope will be the case.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): Will the Leader of the House reconsider his reply to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie)? It is not a matter of debasing debates on Fridays. The difficulty is that many of us have already taken on commitments for that day. If such an important debate was of concern to the Government, it would not be arranged for a Friday. Will the right hon. Gentleman think again?

Mr. Biffen: We all know from personal experience that politics is a balancing of priorities. It is an important occasion, of course, and it is on a Friday. If it is that important to right hon. and hon. Members, I believe that they can be here for it.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is unlikely to be a subject of greater importance to future generations that will be debated in the House than the Warnock report? We are grateful to him for the speed with which he has arranged a debate, and there is a strong case for an early debate, but, if many hon. Members make sacrifices and stay here on Friday, will my right hon. Friend ensure that time will be given to us to speak on that day?

Mr. Biffen: I certainly note my hon. Friend's request, which is rather different from the previous request on this matter, and I shall leave it there.

Mr. Guy Barnett (Greenwich): Has the attention of the Leader of the House been drawn to early-day motion 94, which has been signed by no fewer than 118 right hon. and hon. Members, about the Dreadnought Seamen's hospital in my constituency?

[That this House calls upon Her Majesty's Government not to renege on the undertaking given on 10th June 1981 by the then Minister of Health that the future of the Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital in Greenwich is secure; notes the fact that the Report by Price Waterhouse this year concluded that no evidence had been produced to suggest that there would be any financial savings if the facility for seamen were to be moved to St. Thomas's Hospital; accepts that many redundancies would result from the suggested move and the traditions and special skills of the hospital staff would be lost; and accordingly calls on the Secretary of State to terminate procedures to close the hospital.]

In case he believes that that is merely a little local difficulty, may I point out that it is both a national and an international institution? In view of that, does he believe that time should be made available to debate this important matter in the House?

Mr. Biffen: I immediately acknowledge the importance that the hon. Gentleman adjudicates to the early-day motion and I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services to the point that he makes.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that when the Stansted report is published it will be debated in the House and that a decision whether to proceed on its recommendations will be taken by a vote?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend raises much wider issues than next week's business. I am sensitive to the representations being made on that topic and perhaps on this occasion I shall leave it at that.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): In view of the plight of the research councils, and the moratorium on the Government's information technology programme and its bearing on Britain's industrial future, will the right hon. Gentleman find an early opportunity for a debate on scientific research in Britain?

Mr. Biffen: I am sorry that I cannot offer that prospect, but I realise the importance of the topic and I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's point is referred to those of my right hon. and hon. Friends to whom it is relevant.

Mr. Fred Silvester (Manchester, Withington): Would it not be a good idea to advance the debate on the Warnock report to Wednesday in order to kill two birds with one stone? Is my right hon. Friend aware that it is somewhat naive for him to say that the Civil Aviation Bill debate is unrelated to the Stansted matter? With the best will in the world, our suspicions are bound to be aroused. Why cannot he postpone the Civil Aviation Bill?

Mr. Biffen: The timing of the debate on Wednesday is appropriate. If I were to change it with Friday's debate on the Warnock report, I certainly would be in the hottest of hot water. I cannot now argue the merits of the legislation. That is what Wednesday's debate will be about. However, I assure my hon. Friend that the legislation stands apart from the substantive decisions that will be taken on Stansted.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): In view of the uncertainty that is felt in Wales, and probably elsewhere, about industrial investment by those contemplating investing in industry, will the Leader of the House give time for a statement next week to clarify the Government's intentions on regional policy?

Mr. Biffen: I have announced next week's business and it does not cover the topic referred to by the hon. Gentleman, but I am conscious of the significance, particularly in his part of Wales, of this issue. I shall certainly draw the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Trade and Industry to the point that he makes.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Does my right hon. Friend realise that most of us expect that the Foreign Secretary will be able to give an unequivocal assurance next week that there will be no candle-end economies to mar our record on overseas aid or to interfere with the activities of either the British Council or the overseas service of the BBC? Will he accept that many of us believe that some of the money that seems to have been put aside for Stansted could be more profitably used in that way?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend has kindly given me a trailer of the speech that he would make on Thursday should he be fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker. Just in case he is not, I shall make sure that his remarks are drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Leader of the House accept that we are somewhat surprised at his naive belief that Foreign Office statements are accurate? Will he persuade a Foreign Office spokesman to

[Mr. Dick Douglas]

come to the House and tell us exactly what the Government's attitude is towards the United Nations convention on the law of the sea? We seem to be lagging behind other nations and following on the trail of the United States. Time is short for us to get in line with other nations on that issue.

Mr. Biffen: I shall convey the hon. Gentleman's request to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there was a strong feeling throughout the House and the country this week about the announcement that the green pound was to be abolished? Many people felt that there was a psychological devaluation of our currency and that the elderly would be placed at a disadvantage with the new coins. Will my right hon. Friend please do the House the courtesy of giving some time for a debate on the matter, because we are talking about our pound note, which is very important to the nation?

Mr. Biffen: I appreciate that this topic excites a good deal of popular interest, but I suggest that it is an ideal subject for an Adjournment debate. I wish my hon. Friend well in the pursuit of that.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Will there be an opportunity soon for a debate on the urgent need for reform of the way in which suspected shoplifters are arrested and charged, having regard to today's remarkable victory of Mrs. Maureen Steinberg, who was awarded £1,500 in the High Court for the way in which she was treated by an Oxford street store? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is particularly important at this time of the year that traders and honest shoppers should be warned about the risks?

Mr. Biffen: I genuinely admire the skill with which the hon. and learned Gentleman develops his case and the way that he evangelises, but I do not believe that I can reasonably hold out the prospect of a debate in Government time. However, I am certain that the hon. and learned Gentleman will enjoy himself just as much on an Adjournment debate.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): In spite of the remarks of some bishops and higher clergy at yesterday's meeting of the General Synod of the Church of England, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government still remain opposed to the disestablishment of the Church of England and that the matter will not be discussed next week?

Mr. Biffen: Well, if they are opposed, they are not letting us know next week.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Will the Leader of the House make room in next week's business for the Secretary of State for Defence to tell about his intentions as regards the NATO meeting in Brussels on 3 December on follow-on force attack, a subject about which there has been considerable dissembling by the Government, but on which I have not had satisfactory answers to a series of questions? The defence correspondents tell us that it is the first substantial change in NATO policy for 20 years. Surely we should have a proper, full and frank discussion of the subject on the Floor of the House and in the Select Committee on Defence.

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Lady has already made an eloquent contribution to the subject in an Adjournment debate. I cannot promise any helpful answer in respect of the business published for next week, but I will draw her arguments to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Bearing in mind that my right hon. Friend has ably represented a beautiful but distant part of the United Kingdom in north Shropshire for more than 23 years, will he accept from colleagues who represent constituencies that are a good way from the House that having a debate on a subject as important as the Warnock report on a Friday is unacceptable and offensive to those who need Fridays to remain in contact with their constituencies, despite what London-based Members may say?

Mr. Biffen: The records will show that I have managed to eke out a political existence with Shropshire as a parliamentary base and attendance at the House on Fridays without obvious detriment to my existence. The House would have to consider seriously any circumstance that blocked off Fridays for merely less important or trivial business. It is simply not an option that is available to us if we want to make the most of the opportunities that this House provides.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): When will the Chancellor of the Exchequer be making a statement about the bailing out of the Johnson Matthey bank? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the Chancellor initially said in letters sent to me that the amount of money required by the Bank of England would be very small? However, it has now emerged that the Bank of England—the taxpayers' bank—is committed to up to £75 million. Is not it ironic that this Government, who talk about letting lame ducks go to the wall and who have allowed manufacturing industry throughout the country to be smashed, should be prepared to bail out people as soon as they see their friends in trouble or their casino economy running into flak without even making a statement from the Dispatch Box? Is it not time that they were allowed to be questioned in the House?

Mr. Biffen: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has not found today's Treasury questions sufficiently to his liking, but his difficulties have been——

Mr. Skinner: The Chancellor did not reply.

Mr. Biffen: That is a hazard in this world. However convincing ministerial replies may be, they never altogether answer the incorrigible sceptics. However, I shall certainly draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the hon. Gentleman's discontent, just in case he has overlooked it.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that if the Civil Aviation Bill does anything to control air traffic movements at Heathrow it will be greatly welcomed by my constituents, along with the fact that it is being debated next Wednesday?

Mr. Biffen: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I do not want to be drawn into the controversy, because I have

rather more than enough problems anyway. However, I am sure that it is helpful to have the debate earlier rather than later.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Should not there be an early and urgent debate on the very dangerous situation in central America, where American forces are clearly prepared to invade Nicaragua, to violate that country's independence and to destroy the social progress made? As the British Government have been the most slavish followers of Reaganite policies in central America, should not they be forced to debate in public why they consider it reasonable for the Americans to continue military aggression against the people of Nicaragua?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman deploys his case with fervour, but I am not sure to what extent it is reflected by Opposition Members. I realise that my answer is disappointing, but no provision has been made next week for such a debate, and I cannot see that a debate is likely to take place thereafter. However, it is certainly an appropriate subject for an Adjournment debate.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Wednesday is not a day too soon for the Second Reading of the Civil Aviation Bill and that many of us would have preferred the Second Reading to be on Monday so that we could bring nearer the day when the Government implement their clear and definite promise to limit the number of flights through Heathrow? As my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) has said, that implementation will be warmly welcomed by millions of people living on the west side of London.

Mr. Biffen: I wish to say nothing that will incite further the mild civil disorder that seems to have broken out behind me. I say only that I believe that next week's business is an admirably judged programme, given the wicked nature of this world.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to an early-day motion that was tabled last Session on the subject of loan sharks? Given how elusive Government Departments are about accepting responsibility for that despicable trade, in which about 600,000 per cent. has been charged to poor, mainly unemployed people living on council house estates, will he give the House the opportunity of debating the issue so that we can identify whose responsibility it is to deal with it?

Mr. Biffen: I can offer no prospect of an early debate, but I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry, as I think that the matter falls within that Department's responsibilities.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Will my right hon. Friend show the respect and understanding that we know he has for the starving people of the Third world by ensuring that there will be a decent interval between Thursday's debate on foreign aid and the motion that the Government must bring forward shortly to provide an extra £200 million to cover the Common Market's wild overspending this year on creating and destroying food surpluses?

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that that is the type of sentiment that always rests with me.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Remembering the fanfare of trumpets that followed the announcement at Brighton that the Conservative party had discovered a policy to deal with drug abuse and the absence of any mention of such a policy in the Queen's Speech, are we not entitled to a full statement in the House on the Government's policy?

Mr. Biffen: I shall draw that suggestion to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend share a deep concern about the threat that drug abuse represents.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it has been rumoured for some time that the Stansted report is sitting in the Department of Transport? Is he further aware that people in the north-west regard with the greatest suspicion the debate on the Civil Aviation Bill being held on Wednesday rather than a debate on the Stansted report, which is of enormous importance to the north-west's prosperity?

Mr. Biffen: If the report is sitting in the Department of Transport, it is great news to me. I simply do not believe it.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made next week to explain whether the Government stand by their figures in the summer months when they claimed that 60,000 miners were working in the coalfields? If the National Coal Board figures for the last few days are correct and 6,500 miners have gone back to work, why does the board now admit that only 57,000 miners are working? If we cannot have a statement, will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for someone in the Government to take some maths lessons?

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman has an Adjournment debate on that topic on Monday. He will receive all his answers then and retire defeated from the field.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall call all those hon. Members who have been standing.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend take note that Londoners are concerned about reports that the GLC is establishing a burial fund to continue to fight for its retention after its abolition? Since large sums of ratepayers' and taxpayers' money are involved, will he arrange for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to make an early statement to the House on this important matter?

Mr. Biffen: I understand my hon. Friend's anxieties. I shall certainly draw them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. My hon. Friend can rest reasonably assured that we shall have plenty of debating time in the weeks and months ahead.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Yesterday's debate was on further education, not higher education. Is it possible to have an early debate on the increase in parental contribution, particularly since many married women in work and with adult offspring in higher education will discover that they are paying an effective taxation rate of 64 or 74 per cent. which will allow them

[Mr. Tony Marlow]

merely one quarter of their earnings at the top of the scale? Will my right hon. Friend also put in the Library detail of the agreement for the financial mechanism within Europe?

Mr. Biffen: I shall consider my hon. Friend's second suggestion. I cannot offer the prospect of an early debate, but I shall ensure that his remarks are transmitted to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): In view of the increasing number of prosecutions for Sunday trading, will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate on Sunday trading so that we may guage the feelings of the House?

Mr. Biffen: The ballot has just been taken for private Members' motions and it is just possible that one successful hon. Member will take up that subject in a Bill.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Does my right hon. Friend accept that terrorism throughout the western world and in this country has reached alarming proportions? Short of protection and detection, western Governments seem to be short of ideas on how to combat it. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the subject is now so serious that we should debate it?

Mr. Biffen: I acknowledge the importance of the topic and the desirability of its being debated in the House. It is a subject particularly suited to the initiative of a private Member using the Adjournment mechanism.

Questions to Ministers

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when we reached question No. 8 the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) was not in his place. If the question had been taken, a serious attack on the Government would have resulted. Will you try to find out whether the Treasury Bench encouraged the hon. Gentleman not to be here when we reached that question? After the Dewhurst affair, I would not trust the Treasury Bench as far as I could kick it.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Although the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) was not present—which is not a matter for me—we reached question No. 17, which was similar to question No. 8. Therefore, I do not think that the point of order is valid.

The question of hon. Members not being present during Question Time was raised yesterday. If hon. Members are kind enough to let me know that they cannot be present, I do not call their names.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise to you and to the whole House for not being in the Chamber when my question was called. The annunciator showed question No. 5, but when I came to the Chamber question No. 8 had already passed. It was entirely my fault, and I apologise.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you give the House some guidance on procedure when hon. Members, for various reasons, cannot attend Question Time? Would it not be helpful to the House if in such circumstances hon. Members could entrust other hon. Members to ask their questions? What is the proper forum in which to raise that suggestion?

Mr. Speaker: I think that it would be the Procedure Committee, but if the hon. Gentleman thinks through his suggestion he will realise it would be rather bad luck for those lower on the Order Paper.

Right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask your guidance on the status of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen)? I believe that you have suggested that he is a Back Bencher. Therefore, I wonder why he receives preferential treatment, especially during Question Time.

Mr. Speaker: I think that the answer is common knowledge and that the hon. Gentleman did not need to make the point. The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) is a Back Bencher. The Front Benches stop at the Gangway. However, the right hon. Gentleman is the leader of the Social Democratic party and also a Privy Councillor.

BILL PRESENTED

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. Secretary Fowler, supported by Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. Secretary Edwards, Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Secretary King, Mr. Barney Hayhoe, Mr. Tony Newton and Mr. Ray Whitney, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to occupational pensions, social security and statutory sick pay; and for connected purposes; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed [Bill 10.]

Orders of the Day

Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) and his right hon. and hon. Friends.

4.2 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House has before it today a Bill designed to strengthen the existing safeguards against personation—that is, voting as some other person—at elections held in Northern Ireland. The problem of electoral abuse in Northern Ireland, and personation in particular, is not new. It has long been practised. Indeed, it has been the subject of many cheerful jokes. But there comes a time when the joking has to stop. In the Government's view, the scale of the problem has changed so dramatically in recent years as to amount to a threat to the integrity of the electoral system. That is why we ask the House to act.

The Bill is designed to underpin the fundamental principle, long established in the United Kingdom, that it is for each voter to cast his or her vote in the way he or she wishes. Successive reform Bills in the present and last centuries have culminated in the arrangements that we now have and that are generally accepted as essential in a free society. Vote stealing has always been wrong. It is not only an offence against the person whose vote is stolen, but against basic democratic principles. In a democracy, honest disagreement between citizens is resolved by honest voting.

Let me give the House some of the background. Following allegations of a significant increase in electoral abuse, notably personation, at the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in October 1982, steps available within the law as it stands were taken to diminish the scope for abuse at the parliamentary general election in June 1983. For example, particular attention was devoted to ensuring that the election rules were administered uniformly. Careful thought was given to the deployment of police and the numbers and siting of polling stations. The parties were encouraged to urge their candidates in Northern Ireland to challenge suspected personators. Challenging was a good deal more determined in June 1983 than at the Assembly election in 1982—as shown by the significant increase in arrests for personation compared with the Assembly election. It was clear that a more vigorous approach to challenging had been adopted.

It is, in practice, very difficult to prove personation under the present law. No inquiry as to the right of any person to vote, other than the statutory questions, may be asked. In the face of highly co-ordinated efforts to personate, it was not possible to prevent massive personation at last year's general election.

It might be useful to add a word about the statutory questions. Right hon. and hon. Members may know that the statutory questions are very limited. They are prescribed in rule 35 of the parliamentary elections rules in the first schedule to the Representation of the People Act as follows:

[Mr. Douglas Hurd]

> "(i) Are you the person registered in the register of parliamentary electors for this election?"

Then the entry in the register is read.

> "(ii) Have you already voted, here or elsewhere, at this by-election [general election], otherwise than as proxy for some other person?"

Those are the statutory questions. No inquiry as to the right of any person to vote, other than the above questions, may be made. The voter must not be asked, for example, to spell his name. Nor may a voter be asked if he has been bribed or whether he has done anything which, if he does vote, will render him liable to a prosecution.

The Government have concluded that a Bill is necessary, and that this Bill represents the best way forward. The United Kingdom electoral system is rightly designed to make voting as easy as possible. It was not designed to withstand a campaign of concerted electoral abuse, especially when the competing candidates and their agents do not always make full use of the present electoral law, not least because of intimidation. Various techniques, few of them original, have been used to abuse the democratic process — and in particular personation, involving voting in person or by proxy as some other person. It can range from polling on behalf of someone unable or unwilling to turn up at the polling station, to using the vote of a person who is known not to be going to vote, to outright stealing of a vote from a supporter of another party who has not yet voted. There is no doubt that at the general election in June 1983 large teams of personators were used.

Some evidence of electoral malpractice is provided by the number of tendered ballot papers issued. Those are special pink ballot papers submitted by genuine electors who discover when they get to the polling stations that their votes have already been cast. I should perhaps explain the use of tendered ballot papers under the present law. If a person representing himself to be a particular elector named on the register and not named in the absent voters' list, or a particular person named in the list of proxies and not named in the list of proxies entitled to vote by post, applies for a ballot paper after another person has voted as such an elector or proxy, the applicant shall, upon duly answering the statutory questions, be entitled to make a ballot paper in the same manner as any other voter. But such a ballot paper is pink and is called a tendered ballot paper, and instead of being put into the ballot box, it is given to the presiding officer and endorsed by him with the name of the voter and his number in the register of electors, and set aside in a separate packet. The voter's name and number on the register, or in the case of a proxy, the elector's number on the register are entered on a list called the tendered votes list. On a scrutiny by an election court the vote of the person personating will be struck off, and the vote of the person tendering added. As the admission of the tendered votes raises a prima facie case of personation, evidence may be admitted to rebut it. It follows that the number of tendered ballot papers submitted at an election is an indication—but only an indication, not a precise measure—of the extent of personation at that election. At the 1982 Assembly and 1983 parliamentary general elections the numbers of tendered ballot papers issued was 762 and 949 respectively. The largest numbers were generally in constituencies with a large nationalist electorate in which Sinn Fein made a particular effort, that is to say Belfast, West and Belfast, North, Mid-Ulster, Foyle and Newry and Armagh.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Is it not true that the same tendered ballot papers are used by a presiding officer when a person arrives at the polling station and finds that his name is not on the electoral list? If the list is not properly compiled, that can increase the number of tendered papers.

Mr. Hurd: I do not believe so, but I shall leave my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to deal with that matter. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman has it exactly right.

A second indication is the number of arrests for personation. There were 26 and 149 arrests at the two elections in 1982 and 1983 that I have been citing. But these figures are likely to be only the start of the matter. They give no real indication of the full extent of electoral abuse. The number of tendered ballot papers issued only indicates those votes stolen where the genuine elector has decided to attend the polling station to vote and feels sufficiently strongly to submit a pink ballot paper. Arrests —the other indicator that I have cited—are more a measure of diligence of candidates and their agents in calling for the arrest of personators, often in difficult or threatening circumstances.

The Government are in no doubt that the extent of personation was greatest at the general election last year. Some observers believe that as much as 20 per cent. of the Sinn Fein vote was acquired by malpractice. The precise figure is obviously difficult to establish given the circumstances of electoral abuse. But that the figure is significant is, I believe, widely accepted throughout the community in Northern Ireland. Personation at the European elections this year seems to have been well down on last year's general election, but I do not believe that the House should take comfort from that. That the opportunity for large-scale malpractice can be available to those bent on destroying constitutional politics in Northern Ireland is, in the Government's view, adequate justification for introducing the Bill.

In considering this, my predecessor and I have taken careful account of the views of those parties in Northern Ireland which, whatever their differences, are united in their belief in constitutional action and the need to protect and preserve the democratic process. I do not propose to list the representations made to the Government by the constitutional parties over the past two years, but we have received strong representations from all the constitutional parties to take decisive action to reduce the opportunities for personation.

I draw the House's attention to a report by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights in Northern Ireland on electoral abuse published on 1 October this year following a thorough investigation. The report was critical of Government in some respects, but in paragraph 32, on the crucial quesion of personation, it stated:

> "There is, in the Commission's view, a widespread perception that personation has, in recent elections, become much more systematic and organised and more closely associated with paramilitary groups. The majority of political parties have expressed the view that personation at recent elections both in terms of the number of votes lost and of the manner in which personation is conducted has had more effect than previously. Unofficial estimates vary but even the lowest estimate obtained by the Commission is not insignificant. Proof is notoriously

difficult to obtain and hard-and-fast evidence has not been produced to substantiate or disprove allegations but the weight of opinion within the majority of political parties, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and a wide variety of misgivings, is that some form of identification should be required before a person claiming a vote is given a ballot paper. The Commission has reservations about the merits of such a proposal but accepts that it warrants testing."

When the Government came to consider their proposals, they concluded that the effective choice lay between requiring voters to produce some kind of special identification document or requiring them to produce one of a number of specified existing documents. I know that the first option is favoured by some. Indeed, the question of identity cards raises a much wider issue which it would be hard in practice to resolve in terms of Northern Ireland alone. The issue of identity cards for the purpose of voting might be seen as the first step towards requiring people to carry and produce them for other purposes. This is a well worn argument which I remember when I was a Minister of State, Home Office not long ago. I am sure that the House would want to think very carefully before going down that path. It is fair to add that that solution would be slow to introduce, expensive and cumbersome. Some electors might refuse or otherwise fail to obtain such a document however much the parties encouraged them to do so. The effect of this might be to distort the result.

The Government have therefore concluded after a long study that the right course is to require voters to produce one of a number of specified documents. I know of the argument, of which it is certain we shall hear more in the debate, that the Bill offers no satisfactory means of establishing that a person requesting a ballot paper is in fact the person whom he claims to be. I believe that ours is the best method that can be devised once one accepts, as I think one has to at present, that identity cards are excluded. The provisions of the Bill need to be seen whole, and in particular clause 1, on prescribed documents, needs to be considered alongside the new and important offence created by clause 3. In all the circumstances, the Government have concluded that the approach set out in the Bill best balances the urgent need to reduce the opportunities for personation against minimum change in the established procedures for voting. We wanted to find something which can be quickly applied, is effective, and disrupts to the least possible extent the traditional method of voting.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Does the Secretary of State accept that it is a grave departure that a document issued by a foreign country and a foreign Government should be brought forward at an election within the United Kingdom for the purpose of identification?

Mr. Hurd: That might well be so if we were proposing in the Bill to alter the franchise. We are not doing that and the objection that the hon. Gentleman raises does not really apply.

I add one more general point. Some may argue that they do not disagree in principle with a Bill to deal with electoral abuse but believe that it should be applied to the whole of the United Kingdom. I have seen some signs that some of my colleagues who represent English constituencies hold that view. I know of the anecdotes that circulate —arrangements in other parts of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland are not strictly matters for me— but the Government have no evidence that there is any widespread electoral abuse in Great Britain. No statistics for tendered ballot papers completed or arrests for electoral offences are kept by the Home Office because they are generally negligible in Great Britain. There is certainly in Great Britain no widespread and organised electoral abuse backed up by paramilitary force, such as Northern Ireland has had to endure.

I turn briefly to the main provisions of the Bill. Clause 1 amends the parliamentary elections rules, as respects Northern Ireland, by providing that a ballot paper will not be issued to a voter unless he has produced one of a number of documents that have been prescribed in regulations. As regards the Northern Ireland local government elections next May, the Government propose to bring forward an Order in Council, which will be subject to affirmative resolution, in good time for those elections. The order will contain provisions equivalent to those in clauses 1 to 3 and will also set out the prescribed documents. The provision that I have described is mandatory—the presiding officer or clerk will have no discretion to permit someone to vote without producing a document.

Clause 1 provides also that a presiding officer will refuse to issue a ballot paper if he decides that a document produced by a voter raises a reasonable doubt as to whether the voter is the person he represents himself to be, and further provides that only a presiding officer, not a clerk, may refuse a ballot paper because he decides that a voter's prescribed document raises a reasonable doubt about his identity.

Clause 2 provides that a decision that a prescribed document raises reasonable doubts about a voter's identity may only be reviewed on an election petition. Otherwise, it is to be final, and not to be questioned in any proceedings.

Clause 3 is of crucial importance. It creates an offence of having a prescribed document not bearing the possessor's name, or forged prescribed documents, on polling day for purposes of personation. Clause 3 gives the police the necessary powers in connection with the offence to search vehicles and premises on polling day. The new offence under clause 3(1) attracts maximum penalties on conviction on indictment of imprisonment for two years or a fine or both; and on summary conviction three months' imprisonment or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum of £2,000, or both. This clause should provide a sound deterrent to those who might be tempted to amass those prescribed documents for the purpose of personation.

Clause 4 provides that the provisions of the Representation of the People Acts on entitlement to vote do not prejudice the operations of clauses 1 and 2. The Bill does not directly bear on the franchise: no one will lose the right to be on the electoral register. As I have said, those who do not have a prescribed document will not be able to vote.

Clause 5 ensures that provisions corresponding to the main provisions of this Bill which apply to parliamentary elections may be included in subordinate legislation relating to local government elections in Northern Ireland, elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, and elections held there to the European Parliament.

Clause 7 deals with citation, extent and commencement including—this is significant—a provision whereby, as respects local government elections in Northern Ireland, the Bill shall come into force as soon as it is passed. The Government believe it is essential for an order including

[Mr. Hurd]

these provisions to be operating in time for the local government elections in Northern Ireland next May. I know that, for such a Bill, notes on clauses are thought useful by right hon. and hon. Members. They are now available for information in the Vote Office, as I have already informed the party leaders in correspondence.

I shall now consider the documents that might be prescribed. There should be, and I am sure there will be, considerable debate about them. The Government do not have a closed mind on them. We shall listen carefully to arguments in debate both in the House and in another place. I say to those who might be concerned about the list of documents that will apply for the local government elections next May that we intend to announce, before this Bill completes its parliamentary passage, the list of documents that will be included in the draft Order in Council for Parliament's consideration early in the new year.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): I thought that the right hon. Gentleman said that the final list of documents to be included in regulations would be announced before the Bill completes its passage. As we were told during the business statement this afternoon that the legislation was expected to complete its passage through the House next Tuesday—that is what we are concerned about—does that mean that the list will be available next Tuesday?

Mr. Hurd: I said:

"we intend to announce, before this Bill completes its parliamentary passage—"

obviously, that can include the passage through another place—

"the list of documents that will be included in the draft Order in Council for Parliament's consideration early in the new year."

The drawing up of a satisfactory list is not easy. *[Interruption.]* I entirely accept that. That is why we are especially eager before the list is final, to have the views of right hon. and hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies.

There are two main dangers: on the one hand, making a list so extensive that easily forged or easily obtained documents are included, and, on the other, making it so narrow that some legitimate voters find difficulty in producing any of the documents. With those considerations in mind, we think at present that the list should comprise: a current Great Britain or Northern Ireland driving licence—but not a provisional driving licence—a current United Kingdom, United Kingdom visitors, or Republic of Ireland passport; a current book for the payment of allowances, benefits or pensions issued by the Department of Health and Social Services for Northern Ireland; a medical card issued by the Northern Ireland Central Services Agency; and a marriage certificate issued by the Registrar General for England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, in the case of a woman married since the qualifying date for the register used in the election.

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): The explanatory document provided to hon. Members gave me the impression that the last category included the medical card, plus the marriage lines, of the woman married during the period. Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that it is one or the other? If so, why is it important for the woman to have to produce her marriage lines?

Mr. Hurd: There may be circumstances in which it would be desirable from her point of view, and advisable because of the purposes of the Bill, that that should be one of the documents produced.

Mr. McCusker: Why?

Mr. Hurd: There could be circumstances in which that certificate would be necessary to show that the person concerned is the person on the register.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): A change of surname.

Mr. Hurd: That is right. A change of surname may have occurred and the marriage certificate may therefore be the relevant document.

Mr. Ross: Is it not a choice of any of those documents? If the lady does not want to produce the marriage licence, she does not have to do so, unless she cannot produce one of the other documents.

Mr. Hurd: Exactly.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell *rose*——

Mr. McCusker *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I should continue. I know that there is some criticism of the inclusion of the medical card.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The Secretary of State referred to a marriage certificate issued by the Registrar General for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. What about a marriage certificate issued by the minister on the day of the marriage? Will that not be acceptable?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman can develop that point during the debate, and we shall listen with respectful attention to his argument. I believe that the marriage certificate issued by the Registrar General will be thought by most people to be the right document in this sense.

I know that there is some doubt about the inclusion of the medical card. The advantage of the medical card is that every member of the Northern Ireland electorate may obtain one without charge. If we confined ourselves to the other documents I have listed, there might be people who were, in effect, disfranchised because it was difficult or expensive for them to get hold of one of the prescribed documents. That, of course, is not our intention.

We recognise that personation is but one form of electoral abuse, but we believe that it is the only one that should be tackled urgently in the Bill. It makes good sense to tighten up the postal voting rules. I know that that is of great significance to some right hon. and hon. Members here. We believe that the right legislative vehicle for parliamentary elections is the Representation of the People Bill, which will be introduced shortly and, as regards next year's local government elections, the rule on postal voting can be set out in the order for those elections.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: I apologise for interrupting again. I understood the Secretary of State to say that the major Bill, so to speak, which is to come forward would be the appropriate vehicle for tightening up the conditions for postal voting. May I take it that that means that the Government have abandoned their notion of dealing with the difficulties of postal voting in Northern Ireland by withholding the right to vote by post?

Mr. Hurd: No, it does not mean that. It means that we shall put before the House in the Representation of the People Bill, proposals that are familiar to the right hon.

Gentleman, but we shall listen to what is said. If I may, I shall resume what I was proposing to say because I was going to deal with that point.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I are fully conscious of the anxiety that the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) and others have expressed about the proposed absent voting provisions in the Representation of the People Bill. As we have already made clear, we shall listen with great care to the arguments advanced during the passage of that Bill so as to produce arrangements that best meet Northern Ireland's particular circumstances.

I recognise that the introduction of such a Bill represents a departure from the traditional British way of holding elections. I regret that, and I regret the necessity for introducing the Bill, but I have no doubt of the necessity. I believe that first reactions in the Province to the Bill support the belief that our determination to reduce the opportunities for personation will attract considerable support throughout Northern Ireland and among all those in the House and in the United Kingdom who wish to uphold the democratic process.

The existing arrangements were not designed to withstand the pressures to which they are now subject, and, therefore, we have no option but to propose further measures. This, therefore, is an important Bill. We must take early action to protect the right to vote and to frustrate those bent on organising electoral abuse. The point of principle is clear. However, it is right that the points of detail should be argued. We have many differences in the House, and they are argued with strength and sometimes with bitterness, but we all accept how they are finally resolved—in the votes cast by those whom we serve.

We do not count our successes by the number of bombs in the market place or bodies in the street. Our weapon is the democratic system of voting. The Bill will help to ensure that our weapon is kept serviceable and clean. I commend it to the House.

4.32 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): May I welcome the Secretary of State to his new responsibilities? This is the first occasion on which he has taken part in our debates on Northern Ireland. The Opposition do not undertake always to agree with him, but we will shall seek to encourage him in well doing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) had every intention of being with us, but he was fog-bound this morning in Belfast. He hopes to join us shortly.

I hope that this will be a brief contribution to the debate. The Opposition have their differences with the Government in the context of Northern Ireland, and the list is growing, but this subject is not one of them.

The Bill is about electoral democracy and about ensuring that it functions properly and fairly. That would be of great importance anywhere, but at present I believe that it is probably of particular importance in Northern Ireland because there are people there who feel that democratic politics have not fulfilled their hopes, have not given effect to their aspirations and have not provided them with redress for their grievances. Whether that is true or not, it is a belief which could well be self-fulfilling. It is a necessary condition for a democratic political system to be effective that people should feel confident that it is effective; that it provides a fair and honest reflection of opinion; and that the right to vote is their most effective tool for improving their lot and redressing their grievances. It would be tragic if that confidence were to be further eroded. There is no other hope for the people of Northern Ireland. If they lose confidence in constitutional politics, they are left with nothing.

The need is to strengthen the links between the vote that people cast and the quality of the life which follows. I hope that before long the House will have an opportunity to consider the system of administration in Northern Ireland, because the one proposition that I believe would be assured of general assent in the House is that direct rule is an anaemic substitute for a more robust version of representative government. I hope that shortly the Government will report to the House the progress that has been made in exploring the alternatives. But any constitutional system will depend upon the confidence that people feel in the integrity of the electoral process.

The personation of electors on a wide scale is a poison which could destroy that process. That would be true of personation of the dead or of fictitious persons. It would destroy confidence in the essential characteristic of democracy—that all citizens have equal voting power and that each has one vote. It is even more destructive when it consists of the personation of living people who find that they are deprived of the right to vote.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Stealing their votes.

Mr. Archer: It is stealing their votes. That right was hard won by the campaigners of earlier generations, and it should be thought of as a valued possession. For someone to be told, "Your vote has been stolen. It is something that you must accept with resignation. You have no remedy, but we can offer you the consolation prize of a tendered ballot paper," is to be seen as equivalent to being told, "The authorities do not think your vote is important." That is inconsistent with the assurance that hope for the future lies within a system of electoral democracy.

The fact that the problem of personation exists is not in dispute. In his report for 1982-83, the chief electoral registration officer referred to large numbers of allegations by polling agents of personation and, as the Secretary of State said, he referred to the number of tendered ballot papers and of the difficulty which some candidates have in some areas of persuading people to act as their polling agents. He spoke of the

"perception of a high level of abuse."

The Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, in its report of May 1984, spoke of evidence and perceptions that personation in recent elections had become more systematic.

Hon. Members will be contributing to the debate who are in a better position than I to assess the extent of the problem from their own experience. But of the countless numbers of people in Northern Ireland of all shades of opinion with whom I have spoken over the years no one has sought to conceal the existence of the problem. Personation is accepted as a feature of life. As the Secretary of State said, there are many stories and jokes circulating, and it is part of the folklore. It may be said that personation does not take place only in Northern Ireland —of course instances come to light from time to time on the mainland, but the difference lies in the surprise which they evoke and in the reaction of the people locally.

If an elector in my constituency were to arrive at the polling station to be told that he could not vote because the

[Mr. Archer]

vote had already been excercised, he would be surprised and furious. He would come storming round to the committee room demanding that something be done about it. An unsuccessful candidate who had been prejudiced would consider presenting an election petition. The matter would be discussed widely and there would be great indignation.

I have the impression that in Northern Ireland personation appears to occasion no great surprise. Anyone who showed surprise would be regarded perhaps as a little naive. The reaction would probably be a resigned shrug of the shoulders. That is not a criticism of people in Northern Ireland. In any people, it is a virtue realistically to recognise that theory is not always reflected in the practice.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that if all presiding officers were more persuasive in ensuring that tendered ballot forms were completed when someone failed to exercise his vote who had the right to do so the record might be different?

Mr. Archer: That might be a solution to part of the problem. Of course, if people insisted on filling in tendered ballot papers that would give us better evidence of how widespread the problem was. But the fact that they do not also shows that abuse is accepted with a certain resignation. The evidence is that the abuse is growing and becoming more systematic.

Mr. Peter Robinson: The tenor of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's remarks seems to be that a feeling of resignation has been built into the Northern Ireland electorate which is shown when people go to the polling station and find that their vote has been cast. It is right that they would not be altogether surprised at that, but I can tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman assuredly that they would be furious if it happened—perhaps more furious than people in Great Britain because it means so much more to them than it does to people over here.

Mr. Archer: I am grateful for that assurance. I hope that people would resent strongly the idea that their vote had been stolen. It is only that I learn from discussions that it is one of the facts of life and people say that there is probably not much that they can do about it, meaning not much that they can do about it unless the authorities take the initiative.

Mr. Hume: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is confusing two issues—personation and vote stealing. Personation has taken place traditionally in Northern Ireland, when people vote for the dead or someone who is absent. That is what the jokes are told about. What we are talking about today is an organised militaristic campaign on a wide scale to steal people's votes. That is different from what has gone on traditionally. That is why the Bill has been introduced.

Mr. Archer: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that distinction. It is a distinction that I was in the process of making, but my last words were lost in a succession of interventions.

I said that the evidence is that abuse is growing and, more important, is becoming more systematic. There is a distinction between personation of the dead and of living electors, and stealing votes. It cannot be said that the practice may not exist on a sufficient scale to affect the result of elections. The standing advisory commission said that at the general election in 1983 four constituencies in Northern ireland were won by majorities of fewer than 3,000. I have no reason to think that they were won otherwise than fairly, by genuine majorities, but in any future election, when the margins are so narrow, who is to say that the result may not be affected one way or the other by electoral abuse?

So I believe that there is a good case for introducing some measures of the sort proposed in the Bill. I am aware that there have been suggestions for a special document, an identity card that would have to be produced to obtain a ballot paper. I shall listen to the debate with an open mind, but my initial reaction is that most of us already have to obtain and take care of a wide range of documents and that to add one more to the number would be an unjustifiable burden.

I remember an occasion when I lost my wallet. I discovered that I was without my driving licence, my car insurance certificate, my cheque book, my banker's card, my fishing licence, my blood donor's card and my membership tickets of various organisations. I remember reflecting that I had gone out of existence—all my defining characteristics had been stripped from me. Fortunately, I did not lose my railway season ticket, my television licence, my identity pass to the House of Commons or my passport, because they were not in my wallet. But we live documented lives in a paper-ridden society. So the imposition of the burden of obtaining and safeguarding an additional document, with all the consequences that would follow from losing it or leaving it in one's other jacket, is to be avoided if possible.

I prefer the approach in the Bill. It was helpful of the Secretary of State to tell the House the list of documents that he has in mind to prescribe for the purpose. We can discuss that list subsequently. It would be reasonable if that list were discussed before the House was asked to give a final view on the Bill. But I accept that the object of the exercise is to compile a list sufficiently restrictive to make personation more difficult without making it difficult or impossible for bona fide electors to obtain a ballot paper. I welcome the provision that the documents which are produced will be confidential between the elector and the presiding officer.

I should like to fire a warning shot. I confess that when I read the somewhat draconian powers in clause 3(3) it occurred to me that I had read about similar powers on other occasions, when they caused anxiety in other contexts. The right of a police constable to stop and search a person on reasonable suspicion is a provision which we have met before. Of course, he would have to have a reasonable suspicion first that the person was in possession of a prescribed document which was forged, bore a false name or was in the name of someone other than the possessor and, secondly, that the possessor intended to use it for the purpose of committing the offence of personation. But suppose someone had in his possession his parent's pension book or had been asked by a friend to bring his driving licence because he intended to vote but had left it behind that morning. That person might be stopped in the vicinity of a polling station; he might be stopped and searched. Later we shall want some assurances that the use of those powers will be carefully monitored.

Finally, I should like to refer to the proposal in the Gracious Speech to extend the provisions for absent voting, which have already been mentioned in the debate. It appears that at the moment the Government are not minded to extend those provisions to Northern Ireland. That matter does not arise today. There will be other opportunities to discuss it and at this stage I should not like to express a final view. But the issue is not whether the citizens of Northern Ireland are to be treated fairly. We all lend our weight to that proposition. The question is whether it might be more unfair to subject electors in Northern Ireland to a restriction that does not apply elsewhere, or whether the unfairness would be harsher if they were subjected to an electoral system in which they had no confidence.

I noted carefully the remarks of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) in the debate on the Gracious Speech, when he said that the electorate in Northern Ireland should enjoy the same franchise and the same opportunity to vote as electors elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The argument is that Northern Ireland should not be treated differently. The fact is that in several important respects it is different. It is different in the extent of the perception of electoral abuse. It is different in the strains from which the electoral system must be protected.

There have been occasions when it was I who argued that Northern Ireland should not be singled out for special treatment and that the citizens there should not be deprived of rights that were available to other United Kingdom citizens. On 5 July this year the House debated the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 (Continuance) Order. On that occasion the Opposition drew attention to the inroads that the Act had made upon the civil rights of citizens in Northern Ireland. I sought to persuade the House that the differences between the rights of citizens in Northern Ireland and those of people elsewhere in the United Kingdom should be reviewed to see whether the differences were justified. I failed to persuade the House. I failed to persuade several right hon. and hon. Members who are in attendance today.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The right hon. and learned Gentleman is not being any more successful today.

Mr. Archer: The hon. Gentleman may well be right. But none of us holds the view that Northern Ireland should always be treated differently, or that it should never be treated differently. It is not a question of high philosophic principle; it is a matter of judgment based on the evidence.

The Bill may be thought to be marginal to conversations about the future of Northern Ireland. The debate is not likely to go on record as being among the dramatic parliamentary occasions. I hope that shortly the House will be invited to debate matters such as the Baker report, the discussions consequent on the forum report and the economy of Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, it is an important Bill, and I hope that it will make a contribution to the healthy democratic way of life that we all wish for the people of Northern Ireland.

4.49 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

" this House, while desirous of checking electoral abuse in any part of the Kingdom and prepared to consider proposals to extend the responsibilities and powers of presiding officers, declines to give a Second Reading to a Bill which offers no satisfactory means of establishing that a person requesting a ballot paper is in fact the elector who he claims to be."

Before arguing the case for the amendment, on behalf of all my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Ulster Unionist party I welcome the Secretary of State in his new position and to the Dispatch Box in his first appearance in that capacity. He has, of course, the disadvantage of having come very suddenly to the proposals that he had to put before the House and one was bound to sense that the background was not entirely familiar to him. The passage of time will remedy that difficulty and he may rely on my right hon. and hon. Friends to be available to afford him whatever advice and information we can.

The Bill concerns the entire United Kingdom. It would be absurd to claim that it does not. Any alteration in the conditions for voting in any part of the United Kingdom is the concern of all parts of the United Kingdom and of all Members of the House. It is impossible to say that there is any part of the kingdom in which anxieties do not or might not exist for the integrity of the electoral process. Indeed, in earlier debates we heard from Members representing areas as far apart as Wales and Leicestershire the asseveration that personation was not unknown there.

I associate myself with the claim of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights that

"given that the potential for its abuse"—

that is, abuse of the democratic process—

"is not peculiar to Northern Ireland some of the safeguards currently applied here together with the Commission's suggestions and recommendations could have a wider application."

Let hon. Members be assured that if we qualify or hedge the right of an elector in any part of the kingdom to receive a ballot paper, the matter will come home to roost in other parts of the United Kingdom. This debate and the considerations that apply to the Bill should be laid to heart by Members from all parts of the kingdom.

It would be the predisposition of any hon. Member to be prejudiced in favour of measures preventing electoral abuse. None of us stands to gain from it. None of us is in the business of electoral abuse. One starts prejudiced in favour of a measure laid before the House with the purpose of reducing the scope for electoral abuse. It is, therefore, with the more regret that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I, having studied as best we could not only the provisions of the Bill but the details that have been withheld from it — that is, the list of prescribed documents — have concluded that on balance the Bill will not be beneficial, that it will be onerous to the genuine elector without being effective in checking the abuses at which it is aimed.

We regret, therefore, that our advice to the House must be that the Bill should not be accepted in its present form. The whole matter should be reconsidered by the Government, not just in the light of the debates that will take place on the Bill but on maturer reflection.

It is puzzling that the Bill should have been brought forward with such pressure and haste. Its whole content and the manner of its presentation are redolent of haste and almost panic — ill counsellors in amending the fundamental law of the United Kingdom in so far as it concerns the representation of the people. There has been no real consultation on the contents of the Bill. I accept that there have been interchanges between the Government and various bodies in Northern Ireland, including the

[Mr. J. Enoch Powell]

political parties, about electoral abuse; but the proposals contained in the Bill have never been submitted for consideration or criticism to any of those bodies. The House is being asked to consider these proposals for the first time in their present form.

Despite the comments of the Secretary of State, there is strikingly little evidence to support the urgency that has been advocated. In the same document from which the Secretary of State quoted, the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights stated:

"Any debate which has taken place seems to have relied on assumptions about Northern Ireland which have not been complemented by extensive consultations or by a careful examination of the facts."

I concede at once that in the nature of the case we cannot have full statistics on electoral abuse: the volume of abuse must be deduced from certain indirect indications. The Secretary of State did not seek to deny that. No relationship can be established between evidence such as that of tendered papers in the last election and the volume or importance of the general phenomenon of personation. Still less has any evidence been advanced to show that the volume of that abuse in the Province has increased. Views to the effect — observations to which the term "perceptions" is applied — are frequently heard and widely held; but evidence to justify approving the measures in the Bill on the ground that a growing practice must be checked immediately despite all difficulties has not been produced so far and was certainly not available in the speech of the Secretary of State.

At the root of the abuse with which the Bill is concerned lie two things. First, there is the identification of an individual: who is he? Secondly, there is the establishment of that individual, once identified, as the person entered in the electoral register as entitled to a vote. I believe that it is useful to keep those two separate indentifications apart in studying the Bill and in debating what is practicable and desirable.

The Government propose that no one should be permitted to vote without production of a document. That is the heart of the Bill. In Northern Ireland in the future the right to vote is to be qualified by the condition that it be exercised only on production of a document. Quite obviously, a Bill which has that profound effect can not only not be justified but cannot even be seriously debated unless the House has before it a statement of the documents to which that power is to be attached by the legislation.

The documents are not specified in the Bill. The Government could have written them into the Bill and still retained a power to vary and alter them subsequently by affirmative order. By failing to do so, the Government presented the House with a major proposal for changing the law without at the same time giving the House the basis on which to judge the validity and desirability of their proposal. True, the Minister, so far as he would within the exigencies of time — which I presume were not his choice but that of the managers of Government business — made available to hon. Members who sought enlightenment a proposed list of the prescribed documents in the form of notes on clauses, and I understand that these are available now in the Vote Office.

However, it is not good enough, when the case for the Bill depends on the nature of the documents to be prescribed, for us to be told that a list is available in the Vote Office and that we can debate the Bill without having it before us. So far as we can, my hon. Friends and I have sought to remedy this disability by putting down for Committee stage an amendment which writes those specifications into the Bill and thus makes it possible for us, when we consider the Bill in detail, to look at them one by one and consider what their effect would be if they were enacted.

I have one general statement to make about all the documents which have been suggested. Not one of them is a document which it is the duty of every citizen to hold. There will be citizens who, quite justifiably and properly, do not possess any one of those documents. So we are depriving electors of the right to vote for not possessing a document which they have no duty in law to possess. To put it the other way round, we are making the possession of a document which the citizen does not need to hold the condition of the exercise of his franchise.

That is the first objection to the proposal as it stands. In my view, it is a deeply serious objection. It illustrates my point that we need knowledge of the documents in order to judge the Bill, for if there were among them a document which every citizen has to possess, that difficulty would be be removed. As the list stands, it does not include a single document which every citizen is required by law to possess.

It is all very well for the right hon. Gentleman to say that my argument takes us in the direction of an identity card to be carried by all citizens, and that that is a bigger question. If he is not prepared to face the difficulty that the documents are documents which the citizen is not required to possess, he should reconsider the principle on which he has based his Bill.

I must now take the documents one by one. I will show that they do not in fact establish what we need to establish in order to prevent personation, bearing in mind the two identifications which have to be made—the identificaton of the individual presenting himself in the polling station, and the identification of that person with the elector specified on the electoral roll. Some of the documents bear no evidence of identity. They fail the first test. Some of them fail the second test, because they bear no evidence that the holder is the person specified on the register at a particular address. None of them satisfies both tests.

For instance, the Great Britain driving licence specifies the address of the holder but it does not carry a photograph. Again so far as I know, all the three passports mentioned carry a photograph of the holder but none of them contains his address. An allowance book—as I fear is too well known—contains the address of the lawful beneficiary but no evidence of his appearance or identification. Finally, the medical card not only contains no photograph of the holder but—as my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) may show — gives an address which probably far more frequently than not is not that currently occupied by the holder.

None of those defects is due to any offence committed by the holder or any unlawful omission on his part. It is not the fault of those who hold such documents if, in the respects which I have mentioned, they no longer include accurate evidence, for example, of the holder's address.

Taken as a whole, then, the documents do not provide the evidence which is required for the two essential

identifications. I now invite the right hon. Gentleman to turn to the crucial provision in the Bill, which is contained in new paragraph (1B) of rule 37. I quote:

"Where a voter produces a prescribed document, the presiding officer . . . shall deliver a ballot paper to the voter unless the officer . . . decides that the document raises a reasonable doubt as to whether the voter is the elector or proxy he represents himself to be."

Let us suppose that my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann goes along to vote and takes his medical card, and that his card carries an address at which he no longer happens to reside. Does that raise

"a reasonable doubt as to whether"

he is the voter on the register? I would have thought that it was a defiance of the natural meaning of those words to deny "reasonable doubt" where a person claimed to vote as a particular elector at a particular address and produces a document which showed him as living somewhere else.

It might be that neither the voter's Christian name nor his surname were rarities. They might both be very common indeed, either in general or—as is often the case in Northern Ireland—in that particular locality. The identification of the elector by the place where he lives is therefore a matter of extreme importance — the acid question. Yet here we have an enactment which states that if any one of the documents which the elector produces

"raises a reasonable doubt as to whether"

he is the person of that name living at that place, he will not be given a ballot paper.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will tell me if I am mistaken, but to my belief the presiding officer asks the voter no question. Subject to correction, I understand that the presiding officer is not entitled under the law to ask the voter how it happens that the address on his document is not the address of the elector who he claims to be. Repeated rulings of the courts have declared that such inquiries are not within the power of a presiding officer. So the Bill enacts that, without making any further inquiry, the presiding officer must examine only the document

"unless the officer or clerk decides that the document raises a reasonable doubt".

The word is "the document"—the presiding officer is entitled to direct his attention to the document and nothing else. There is no suggestion that the elector can be given his ballot paper because an inquiry establishes that he lives at the address of the elector who he claims to be. The presiding officer will not ask him, "Tell me the name of the people who live at No. 27," or, "Do you know the name of the people who live opposite?". There will be no such investigation. If the document is not 100 per cent. evidence of the identity of that person—if it "raises a reasonable doubt"—the ballot paper will be withheld.

In the notes on clauses there are comforting references to the fact that the elector will be allowed to return home to try to find another document. I was extremely grateful to the draftsman of those notes for the assurance that an elector will be allowed to have a second go. One might almost have supposed that, at some time in the drafting of the Bill, provisions were discussed that would have prevented him from doing so.

I invite you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to a flight of imagination which does not take you beyond your personal experience. Imagine you are in a polling station at 9.45 pm. An elector, in all good faith, knowing that one of the documents he can bring with him is his medical card, produces it. The presiding officer, doing his duty, says, "This document raises a reasonable doubt whether you are the elector." He does so without looking at the elector or asking any questions. The elector says, "If you do not like it, I will go away and try to find another document". Will he get back in time to vote? Has he been denied his vote falsely and improperly? Yes, he has. That is what will happen on a massive scale as a result of the provisions of the Bill. People will be asked to produce documents which some of them, with every right and justification, do not possess. Others, who possess those documents, will discover that they do not meet the terms of the Bill.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Is not the most astonishing aspect the fact that the presiding officer could look at my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) and say, "I know that you are Harold McCusker. My eyes tell me that, my personal knowledge tells me that, but the document does not tell me that, so go away." Is it not a fact that in Northern Ireland thousands of electors are known to presiding officers at every polling station, yet they will not be allowed to use the evidence of their eyes?

Mr. Powell: I take my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Hume: They are not legislating for common sense.

Mr. Powell: I take the point of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) also. Common sense would indeed dictate that the presiding officer should use his knowledge and ask such questions as he thought fit to elicit whether an imposition was being attempted; but the law prevents that—the requirements of the legislation are clear and specific.

A simple conclusion can be drawn from all this as to the direction in which we should improve our electoral law in future. We must find a way of escaping from the nonsense of presiding officers putting the statutory questions to a person who asks for a ballot paper and then being obliged to give it him although they know the answer was a lie. It is called a "satisfactory" answer if it is either yes or no, as the case may be—that is the meaning of art of the word "satisfactory" in this context. Under the law at present, if those statutory questions are answered—however manifestly untruthfully they are answered—the ballot paper must still be delivered. I see no direction in which we can make progress—and progress must be made not only in Northern Ireland but in other parts of the United Kingdom to preserve the integrity of the electoral process — unless we are prepared to give presiding officers responsibility for satisfying themselves that the person to whom they give a ballot paper is the person intended by the entry in the electoral roll to have a vote.

Only one thing can be done wisely with the Bill. The Government should take it away and reconsider the whole matter. We shall have an opportunity in Committee—commencing next week, though there is no assurance of that stage being completed next week—of discussing in more detail the meaning of the provisions and the nature and consequences of the documents which are proposed to be specified.

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman is under no obligation as a Back-Bench Member to put forward a positive proposal, but I have listened carefully to his analysis and to his criticisms. Is it his conclusion, according to his perceptions, that there is no real need for

[Mr. Hurd]

such a measure, or is it his conclusion that a measure is needed, but that it must rest on a completely different basis, including a special document that would in effect be an identity card?

Mr. Powell: My propositions are—this is a resumé—first, that whatever is necessary is necessary for all electors in all parts of the United Kingdom; there should be assurance of the integrity of the electoral process throughout the United Kingdom. Secondly, we must entrust presiding officers with a discretion that is at present withheld from them by law. Thirdly, if we believe that that is not satisfactory and that there must also be documentary certification of identity, such certification must be binding and compulsory on all citizens, as otherwise we shall create an injustice by the Bill, an injustice between one citizen and another as well as between the citizens of one part of the United Kingdom and those of the rest of the United Kingdom. I hoped that I had not left those conclusions in any doubt by my argument, but I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for eliciting the restatement from me.

When the Secretary of State has heard argument, not only today but in Committee, on the details of the Bill, he should recognise that it will be oppressive to the genuine elector—perhaps on a massive scale—without being effective. He should take it away and after more thought has been given, deal with this problem in the wider context of legislation on the representation of the people in the United Kingdom as a whole.

5.18 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I join my colleagues in wishing the Secretary of State well in his appointment. I should say that I was not a party to a resolution in the Northern Ireland Assembly calling for him to return home immediately he was appointed, as other Members were, but that is only by the way. He will know already that the representatives of Northern Ireland will speak their minds to him forthrightly and fully.

I agree with the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) that the Bill was conceived in great haste. I can illustrate that. I do not wish to repeat anything that has been said because many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. All the notes on clauses, except one, have been commented on by the right hon. Member for South Down, and I wish to deal with that one. It is evident that the person who drew up this Bill was divorced from the reality of the situation in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State should know that, when a marriage takes place in a church building, and the officiating minister issues a marriage certificate, the Registrar General for Northern Ireland knows nothing about it for three months, until the marriage return is given to him.

Therefore, a woman can get married and change her name. She goes along to the presiding officer to cast her vote and she has her marriage certificate from the minister, which is the only certificate that she can have inside a three-month period, and she has her medical card. The presiding officer says that the certificate is not from the Registrar General for Northern Ireland and, according to the Bill, a marriage certificate issued by the Registrar General for England and Wales, for Scotland or for Northern Ireland is what is required. It would be impossible for that woman to have such a certificate inside a three-month period.

The people of Northern Ireland who are married in the churches of Northern Ireland get their marriage certificates from the minister who officiates at the ceremony. Any minister knows how often, in cases of pensions, death and unemployment benefit, the people come directly to him to get the necessary certificate. Therefore, the person who drew up the Bill was completely divorced from what is happening in Northern Ireland.

Mr. McCusker: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, in all probability, the lady in question does not require marriage lines to justify to the presiding officer that she is the entry on the register, because the entry is in her maiden name and she is still that person, even if her name has changed? She would probably have ample evidence to show that that is still the case.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I agree, but I am dealing with what the Bill is saying, and it makes a laughing stock of the position in Northern Ireland. It means that the House is asked to accept something that is not a part of real life in Northern Ireland. If we are dealing with certificates and documents, let us deal with them as they are in Northern Ireland. Let us not have an English, Scottish or Welsh situation introduced into Northern Ireland, as if that is what happens there as well. I know that nonconformist churches have a different form of registration of marriages, but all this shows that the Bill has been conceived in great haste. We have only just finished debating the Queen's Speech, and the next day we are rushed in to the Bill, and that makes me wonder.

Mr. Hume: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a serious problem of electoral abuse in Northern Ireland? If he does accept that, what measures does he propose to deal with it?

Rev. Ian Paisley: If the hon. Gentleman waits a little, he will discover my view, which has already been given in writing to the previous Secretary of State. I have a firm view on this matter, about which the new Secretary of State should know. I am dealing with an important point about these documents. If there is any sense in the legislation that we are asked to pass, that legislation should help to deal with the problem mentioned by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume). I suggest that this Bill will not help at all but will hinder.

The House should be encouraging the people of Northern Ireland to go to the ballot box more. It is difficult to get people to vote in Northern Ireland, for the simple reason that they say that the House of Commons does not recognise what the ballot box says. That is said over and over again. People ask what is the use of voting. If the hon. Gentleman knows anything about Northern Ireland, he will know that that is asked by his supporters as well as by the supporters of other parties. People should be encouraged to vote and should not be hindered in their desire to do so.

Legislation such as this will discourage people from voting for the simple reason that the document concerned, which may be the right document, may raise reasonable doubt in the mind of the presiding officer, instead of helping the presiding officer to give the voter a ballot

paper, and he will have to follow the law and not give a ballot paper. It would be terrible if the House discouraged voting patterns in the Province.

I had serious misgivings about the Bill, but after listening to the Secretary of State I have more. The House needs to know before Tuesday what the documents are. On Tuesday, we go into Committee on the Floor of the House, but we shall be in ignorance of what the documents are. How can we be asked to deal with this matter in Committee if we do not know that? It is important that we should know before Tuesday.

It is no use us knowing what the documents are when the Bill goes to the other place, nor if we are told that we shall hear about them as the parliamentary procedures continue. That will mean that when the Bill is discussed in the other place, we shall hear, having finished our discussions, what the regulations will be. The House needs to know now, and the Secretary of State should give us an assurance that we shall know what we are passing, so that we may discuss it in a proper manner.

It is deplorable that we have the present position in Northern Ireland. That highlights the fact that the House, and successive Governments, have failed to deal with law and order in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State has told us that this legislation is to deal with the actions of Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA. He has said that it is not the constitutional parties that are responsible for the problem, but Sinn Fein and the IRA.

If the IRA had been dealt with properly by the Government, and if proper actions had been taken by the Government, we should not have to discuss legislation such as this tonight. There is no doubt that we need to emphasise this because a serious situation has arisen in Northern Ireland. There is no doubt that in areas where Sinn Fein and the IRA—they are one and the same and we do not need to make a distinction between them—have a strong following, although not necessarily a majority, they intimidate the voters. They also put pressure on those who represent the other candidates in an election. That is important, because candidates have polling agents in the electoral booths to look after their interests and to see that those who are voting are proper voters.

I know that pressure is put on individuals. The people who go into the polling booths as agents for the candidates must be well known in the area. They are of little use if they are not well known. They must know practically everyone in the area, and they must be able to discern whether a would-be voter is acting rightly.

In the quiet comfort of the House hon. Members may not realise it, but sitting in a polling booth, seeing a person come in who is known to be attached to the IRA and known to have been into the booth before, for anyone to open his mouth and say so is to invite a petrol bomb that night or a member of his family being shot. Those are the facts of life that we have to face.

I salute those who are prepared to undertake the task of acting as polling agents in elections. When I started electioneering in Ulster there were polling booths into which I put people which I would not dream of doing today. I would not risk their lives. No election is worth a life. There are polling booths in my constituency which I used to visit during elections that I would not visit today in case I caused trouble to individuals in the area. Those are the facts of life brought about by successive Governments not facing the truth.

We have that situation today, and very serious it is. If we are to rectify it, the IRA nettle has to be grasped. I do not understand how an organisation can one day be proscribed and the next day be legal and free to go about its business. The leadership of Sinn Fein is the leadership of the IRA, and the actions of Sinn Fein are typical of actions of the IRA. There is no difference between them. I have made a study of the position on the ground, and I find that those who lead the Provisional IRA are those who lead Sinn Fein. They have a joint leadership.

The Government should do something about the IRA and Sinn Fein. There is no reason why they should not say that Sinn Fein is proscribed, because it is in reality part of the IRA set-up.

Coming to the matter with which the Bill seeks to deal, I stress that it must be dealt with in a practical and sensible way that grasps the nettle. The only way that that can be done is to have a proper method of identifying the would-be voter. If there is no proper way of doing so, the whole exercise is abortive. I suggest to the Secretary of State that none of the documents that he has mentioned will give a proper, realistic identification. That is why I have to condemn this proposal. It will not succeed.

I hope that the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) will take note of what I am saying. We are discussing a very important measure. There is a problem, and it needs to be grappled with, but the only way to do it is to have a proper means of establishing a person's identity.

How is that to be done? There has to be a proper identity card bearing a photograph of the holder, his description, his present address and his signature. What is more, when anyone votes with that card there has to be a way of marking or punching it so that it cannot be used again in the same election.

We are told that that cannot be done. If we are not prepared to do it, we are unable to deal with the situation. If we say no to that, any other way is putting an onus on the presiding officer, who will not be able to do his job properly.

As for the mechanics of the Government's proposal, how long will it take to vote in Northern Ireland under this system? A person arrives in the polling booth, he gives his name and number and he is then asked what document he has. Most would-be voters will say that they did not know they needed any documents. Frequently they do not even know the names of the candidates, let alone the document that is required from them. I hope that part of the mechanism will be to put the names of candidates before the electorate. But the presiding officer can say to such a person, "It is all right. You have come in good faith, but you cannot produce any document which I can say is a prescribed document. Such voters as you raise a reasonable doubt in my mind, but I will permit you to go away and, if you wish, you may reapply some time later for a ballot paper by producing one of the prescribed documents."

That is all very well, but there is only one qualification for the franchise. It is that a person must be over 18 years of age and on the electoral roll. Now we are changing that. We are saying that we shall have a different way in Northern Ireland and that anyone who is unable to produce one of the necessary documents cannot vote.

How much time will it take? The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) talked about people voting before 10 pm. But in Northern Ireland elections we do not vote from 7 am until 10 pm. That applies to parliamentary

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

elections, of course, but in local elections and Assembly elections voting is only allowed between 8 am and 8 pm. The right hon. Member for South Down spoke of an elector coming to the polling booth at a quarter to 10, but in the case of a local election it would have to be at a quarter to eight. There is less time for voting. What is to happen if there is a queue of people down the road claiming to have the necessary documents? Will they be unable to get into the polling booth after it is due to close? The first to shout about that if it happened would be the hon. Member for Foyle. We all know that people in Northern Ireland do not vote early. The peak voting period is round about tea time.

What about this time factor? Will the Secretary of State assure us that there will be more ballot boxes and more workers in polling booths? I can assure him that we shall need twice the number of workers and twice the number of polling stations that we have in an ordinary election. Will the Secretary of State give that undertaking? According to the Bill not much money is to be spent on the Government's proposal.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the time scale is further shortened by the fact that under the Stormont Electoral Law Act, under which local government and Assembly elections are held, presiding officers take it upon themselves to instruct the policeman on duty outside polling stations not to admit people so that they may queue inside in the remaining few hours before the polls close?

Rev. Ian Paisley: Anyone shut out remains shut out even though he may have been there before the appointed time. If there is a queue, people are not allowed into a polling station.

Are we to have extra time? Will polling in Northern Ireland be from 7 am to 10 pm, as it is for elections to this House? Will the hours be even longer, because there will be awful delay in getting the necessary documents presented and moving people towards the ballot boxes?

By a law passed by the House the voting arrangements for local government elections and Assembly elections in Northern Ireland are different. They are not one-seat constituencies. It takes longer to vote. People are not voting for just one candidate. There are possibly 20 candidates, and even more in local government elections. Voting takes a long time. I remember a former Prime Minister, now Lord Wilson of Rievaulx, talking about devolution for Wales and Scotland and saying that the people of Wales and Scotland would be confused and therefore that it was not possible to bring on proportional representation. I congratulate the people of Northern Ireland on being wise enough to be able to use proportional representation. But it takes longer and every hon. Member from Northern Ireland knows that.

What can be done about the time factor? The Government must face up to the problem. Or do they not want the people of Northern Ireland to vote? We have to face up to that. Northern Ireland will be kept on the right path only if the people are given the opportunity to exercise their franchise properly. If that is taken away we shall be in serious trouble.

I and my colleagues will be voting for the reasoned amendment tonight. We are not saying that there is no problem. Let it not be said that Unionists of all sections said that there is no problem. We know the problem from a point of view different from that of the hon. Member for Foyle. We know what happens in areas of divide such as Toome, Dunloy and the Glens, and those areas where we no longer put people into polling stations because of threats and intimidation. I can well understand the situation that people who represent his party face. I know what is happening.

Let it not be said that we do not think there is a problem. There is. But the only way to deal with it is in the way that I have suggested. If it is not dealt with in that way, at the end of the day all those documents will only make matters more difficult for the presiding officer and for the person who believes in the ballot box and wants legally to exercise his franchise. I appeal to the Government to have second thoughts on the matter and face up to the reality of the situation.

5.41 pm

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State to his new post. If he is not in despair already, I shall be surprised. I thought that this was an enabling measure and a Second Reading debate. But it appears that, because the Government have been generous enough to suggest various documents, the proposals are being torn to ribbons already.

I speak in ignorance in as much as I have never—thank God—been in Northern Ireland during a general or local election. I have enough problems in my constituency. Therefore, I do not propose to speak with any confidence that I shall get any of the facts right about election time in Northern Ireland. But it is true to say that the chief electoral officer, Mr. Bradley, has instigated considerable improvements in procedures over the past few years. As we recognise from the Secretary of State's comments, there was not quite so much abuse in the European elections last year.

I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) say that people in North Ireland do not turn out to vote. They certainly turned out to vote in vaster numbers than in the rest of the United Kingdom during the European elections. Some loopholes have been closed, but it seems to be accepted that there is need for further action. Therefore, albeit reluctantly, I agree that the measure before us today is required.

I am interested in what has been said about the documents themselves. If the matter does not come up in Committee on Tuesday it will surely be coming in the affirmative resolution which will come before the House in due course. I want to throw out a suggestion which will probably be shot down in flames. Surely checks should be made when the registers are prepared, which I believe is now done by the political parties in Northern Ireland. Is there not some way in which a polling card could be validated before electors go to the polls? If the electoral register is right and people then have to get their polling cards and have them validated, that may be one way round the problem.

If we are to reintroduce identity cards, and if the speech of the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) is taken on board and they apply throughout the United Kingdom, surely everybody in the House will say that the rest of the United Kingdom will be completely opposed to the introduction of identity cards. General opinion would be against it. It would be far too drastic.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): The hon. Gentleman is a great believer in the EC. Do not other member states of the EC use identity cards? Is not the identity card which we as hon. Members carry a great convenience and protection of ourselves as well as of the public interest? Why does he object to a document with a photograph and a signature which can clear up all kinds of difficulties for the citizen?

Mr. Ross: Well, I am opposed to it, and I think that the hon. Gentleman will find that public opinion in Britain would be opposed to it as well. I remember, as he will, because he is probably of my age, the joy with which we burnt our identity cards after the last world war. There would be just as much outrage over their reintroduction as over the abolition of the £1 note.

On the whole, the list of prescribed documents seems adequate, but I accept that points have been made which should be taken on board in Committee and when the affirmative motion is before the House.

There is provision of some £50,000 for equipment in the polling stations and £45,000 for additional staff. That should cover some of the arguments of the hon. Member for Antrim, North. Surely it would not be difficult to change the polling hours. Why can we not extend polling hours to 9 or 10 o'clock if it will take longer to vote? I am aware that there have been impersonations. What has been going on in some parts of Northern Ireland has been described to me. Some 14-year-olds have masqueraded as people much older. However, despite the additional bureaucracy, this is a worthwhile measure and I shall certainly support it.

5.46 pm

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): We should recognise at the beginning that the Bill is about the protection of the right to vote in Northern Ireland, which has come under fairly serious threat in recent elections. Every hon. Member who has spoken accepts that it is a serious problem. My party in particular has had to face the problem at its most serious.

At the moment the only protectors of the right to vote in Northern Ireland are party agents in polling stations who have to challenge people who come in who they think are not the persons on the register. There has been a fairly sustained and widespread attempt in recent elections to steal votes in an organised fashion.

In my constituency in the previous election we kept a record of such attempts. In each polling station there were about 700 voters. By lunch time on election day in the stations where that check was carried out my agents had turned away an average of 50 voters per booth. They were turned away, not arrested, so they do not appear on the record. In addition, in many areas of Northern Ireland such people were not stopped. People who do such work are subject to intimidation. As everybody knows, SDLP workers' homes were attacked after that election to ensure that they would not sit in polling booths in future. It is wrong to place on ordinary people the responsibility of protecting the right to vote. There is a duty on hon. Members to produce the means to do so. I hope that the argument today is not about the principle but about the means and the objectives.

Some doubts have been raised about the particular measures proposed. We have discussed the problem with the Secretary of State and his predecessor. What is proposed today is not a perfect or foolproof system of preventing voting abuse, but it substantially reduces the possibility.

I also hope that it is only a temporary measure because there is a much more foolproof method of stopping voting abuse. I recognise the urgency of what is put forward. It is the only way to deal with the problem before next year's local elections. When talking about local elections and proportional representation in Northern Ireland, one is talking about seats being won on 50 to 100 votes. Therefore, the Bill has a major importance for local government elections and some action must be taken before next May. This is the only action that can be taken before May.

However, I urge the Secretary of State to realise that the best way of controlling vote-stealing is at the point of registration. A voter who registers for a vote is not asked his date of birth; he is merely asked to state that he is over 18. He ought to be asked to state his date of birth and sign his application for a vote. A copy of his signature and his date of birth could be given to the presiding officer and that would be a foolproof system of preventing vote-stealing without burdening people with the methods that have been proposed today.

I ask the Secretary of State to include such a system in the Bill for the future registration of voters. I agree that there are loopholes in the proposed system, but it is the best that can be done, bearing in mind the urgency of dealing with the problem.

Mr. William Ross: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that instead of the head of the household filling in a form for his household every year, each individual elector should have to apply for a vote?

Mr. Hume: Yes. That is precisely what I am saying.

5.51 pm

Mr. Harold McCusker (Upper Bann): I favour the objectives of the Bill. Unlike some hon. Members, I have personal experience of the abuses that occur.

However, two activities in Northern Ireland have acquired a mythology—smuggling and personation. We all have our favourite stories. We repeat them, they become exaggerated and eventually form the folklore referred to in the background documentation provided by the Secretary of State.

Not long ago a Parliamentary Under-Secretary who was asked about control of the border told us that there was no way that the border could be controlled and cited in support of his claim the fact that smuggling had been going on for centuries. He forgot that the border had existed for only 55 years. That Minister was taken in by the mythology.

Much of what is said about personation is exaggerated, and I regret that some of the comments in this debate will contribute to the mythology and the folklore. The background documentation uses such words as "overwhelming impression" and "much folklore". It says that there are no figures to support claims of widespread personation, but adds that any figures might represent only the tip of the iceberg. The documents refer to reports of extensive abuse at the Assembly elections, the general election of 1983 and the European elections of 1984. I hope that we can dispel some of that mythology.

[Mr. Harold McCusker]

There is abuse, but increasingly it exists only in isolated locations in specific constituencies. In many areas, personation, as distinct from vote-stealing, never occurs.

I am worried that attempts to eliminate abuse in some areas may have damaging and drastic effects on ordinary people seeking to exercise their right to vote. Perhaps we should try merely to reduce personation and vote-stealing rather than to eliminate them.

Until the early 1970s, "benign" personation was practised by both parties in Northern Ireland. Both parties abided by certain unwritten rules. The voting registers were seen to include Unionist and Nationalist voters. Party activists put people's names on the register and felt that they had a duty to ensure that all the votes were cast.

If sickness, death, holidays, changes of employment or people moving house meant that some voters were not able to vote, the enthusiasts felt obliged to ensure that those votes were cast. I do not justify that practice, but it was carried out by both parties in most elections.

As I said, we all have our favourite stories. Early in my active involvement in politics, a woman who had buried her husband the previous day came to the caravan where I was acting as a tallyman and handed in her late husband's papers. Tearfully, she said, "I know Willie John would have wanted his vote cast." There was no way that any of us could tell her that she could not do that. She did not think that she was doing anything wrong. She merely thought that fate had denied her husband the opportunity to do his duty and that it was incumbent upon her to ensure that that duty was performed. I am sure that it was performed.

I also recall a little old lady aged about 67, with white hair and bright rosy cheeks, coming to a polling station and saying, "My granddaughter has the same name as me, but she went to university last week. I have already voted at another polling station, but is there anything to stop me from voting for my granddaughter?" I said that there were plenty of things to stop her, but there was no stopping her. When she came out of the polling station five minutes later, her face was rosier than it had been when she went in. I asked her what happened and she said, "They told me that I was too young to vote." She had forgotten that her granddaughter, whose name was on the register, had not reached the qualifying voting age.

Those sort of stories contribute to the mythology and become the basis of jokes and anecdotes. Many hon. Members accept it as a fact that there is widespread personation throughout Northern Ireland. That view is accepted in *The Economist* this week. It talks of the "spoilsport" Government interfering in yet another hallowed Ulster tradition and says:

> "But the Province's democratic parties, most of which have in the past won seats with bogus votes, will unite to support the change. They fear the electoral impact of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army."

I dispute the claim that any political party ever won a seat as a consequence of personation. If that were true, surely all the academic investigations conducted into Northern Ireland affairs over the past 15 years would have produced some proof. But that has not happened. The truth is that the benign personation was invariably a waste of time. The votes cast usually cancelled each other out, and the hackles of activists were raised only when someone broke the rules. Over the years, various parties would kick up a fuss about personation if they lost the election. That was almost part of the game as well. But they never thought it worth while to pursue it much further than that. However, things have changed because Sinn Fein has broken the rules and has engaged in vote-stealing on a massive scale. That is "malign" personation. By and large, the other type of personation was accepted. There were ground rules, and it had little effect. However, this vote-stealing is different. There can be no doubt but that party activists are very concerned about it.

Nevertheless, vote-stealing does not take place throughout the Province. It is no doubt practised in Belfast, West, Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Mid-Ulster and perhaps in Foyle and to some extent in Newry and Armagh, but that is only five constituencies out of 17. In most of the Province the attitude towards benign personation has changed. Most people think that it is a waste of time and that it performs no useful function. They are also beginning to realise that the rest of the world frowns on such behaviour, and they do not want to belittle themselves by engaging in it.

In my experience such vote-stealing is virtually confined to Sinn Fein. It is highly organised and extremely refined. I worked on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) in the first by-election that he fought. I went into polling stations in Coalisland and Washing Bay where no Unionists voted or could be put in to act as polling agents. What I saw there shocked me to the core. I could not believe that there could be abuse on such a scale. Of course, the Sinn Fein activists were simply stealing the votes of their co-religionists. They were stealing not Unionist but Roman Catholic votes. One family after another would arrive at the polling station only to be told that their votes had already been cast. They would momentarily fly into a rage and then look at the Sinn Fein representative in the polling station. When they were asked whether they wanted to make a complaint they shrugged their shoulders and left. I witnessed that in both Washing Bay and Coalisland.

Later that evening I went to Dungannon, having been disgusted at what I had seen earlier in the day. It was not the stealing of votes that revolted me as much as the total disregard for the democratic process. In a school in Dungannon I watched young Sinn Fein activists being rugby tackled along the corridors as they raced out of the various booths where they had been challenged. Some of the party workers who were there on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone thought that it was tremendous that those people were being caught. Indeed, substantial numbers were caught, but for every one caught, perhaps six or seven got away. When I was asked why I was not smiling I had to say that it was because I was watching people who did not give a fig for the democratic process and were systematically exploiting its weaknesses. As far as they were concerned, they would exploit it when it suited them, with the objective of destroying it.

Therefore, I have personal experience of vote-stealing, and I have no doubt that it also occurs in the other constituencies. Let us consider what has happened during the recent elections in Northern Ireland. I disagree with something that the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) said. Personation does not have the same impact on elections using proportional representation as on first-past-the-post elections. At the most, it could affect the election result in so far as one out of five, one out of six or one out

of seven candidates would be elected who would not otherwise have been. However, in a first-past-the-post election, the situation could be completely altered and the wrong person could be elected. The effectiveness of personation is therefore reduced when proportional representation is used. I have not given the matter much thought, but I should imagine that the more personation, the higher the quota. Therefore it can have an adverse effect on one's objective.

We have heard that it is thought that massive personation took place during the 1982 election for the Assembly. On that occasion, for every person who voted in Antrim, South, one person did not vote. There was a 52 per cent. poll there. In Antrim, North, for every six people who voted, or thereabouts, more than four people did not vote, because there was only a 57 per cent. poll. The figures are: in Belfast, North a 59 per cent. poll; in Belfast, South a 61 per cent. poll; in Belfast, East a 54 per cent. poll and in North Down a 53 per cent. poll. There were several constituencies with reasonable percentage rates in the sixties. Once again, only two constituencies had figures that showed that there might have been abuse. In Fermanagh and South Tyrone there was an 83 per cent. poll and in mid Mid-Ulster a 75 per cent. poll

But with the exception of those two constituencies, how can it be argued that massive personation occurred on a scale that changed the results? As the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) said, we should be concerned that the results show that the people of Northern Ireland are turning away from the ballot box. I hope that the Minister will produce some evidence to show that, with the exception of the two constituencies that I have mentioned, there was massive and systematic personation. If he cannot produce such evidence, he is inflicting conditions on the other constituencies that will mean that a greater number of people will be deterred or prevented from voting than lost their votes through the abuses that have occurred in the other two constituencies.

Let us consider the percentages for the 1983 general election. In some ways they were higher than for the 1982 election, but the bulk of them fell within the same range as existed on the mainland, and ranged from 64 per cent. to something in excess of 74 per cent. However, there are one or two constituencies that stand out. As one might imagine, Fermanagh and South Tyrone had an 88 per cent. poll. Mid-Ulster had an 84 per cent. poll, Foyle a 77 per cent. poll, Londonderry, East a 76 per cent. poll and South Down a 76 per cent. poll. But even then there were only six constituencies with percentages higher than 75 per cent. Only two of them perhaps give cause for concern that abuse might have taken place. The results, which are similar to those on the mainland, surely do not illustrate massive and systematic personation, or vote-stealing throughout the Province.

It is vital that we should not overestimate or over-react. Does anyone really suggest that, with the exception of those two constituencies, abuse is so great as to have affected the outcome of those two elections in total terms? I believe that personation is likely to affect only first-past-the-post elections. There is only one such election left in Northern Ireland, and that is to the House. Most people in Northern Ireland feel most strongly about that election and I think that that is why there was an increase in the poll in 1983. The people of Northern Ireland know that it is important to vote in general elections, and they turn out with greater enthusiasm and in greater numbers than for any other elections.

We are considering the effects of the abuse, which is limited, and the consequences of Sinn Fein exploiting its total vote. If that is a correct analysis, is the Bill the proper way to deal with it? I think that it is not.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is there not an increasing real Sinn Fein vote?

Mr. McCusker: Yes, Sinn Fein does have a real increased vote. That vote has always existed potentially but Sinn Fein supporters did not exercise their franchise because it did not suit them at various times in the past 50 or 60 years.

The likely effect of the Bill will be to reduce personation and vote-stealing, but it will also deter, discourage and prevent some people from voting who would want to vote and whose vote would probably affect the outcome of elections. The Bill removes one vote-stealing exercise and substitutes another. That is the only conclusion to which one can come in the light of the statistics for the 1982 and 1983 elections.

Democracy is important. It is important to the people of Northern Ireland. In the last 12 years democracy has been threatened in Northern Ireland. Only recently have I realised how fragile it is in Northern Ireland. If people had realised how fragile it was in the early 1970s we might have been in an even more dangerous position.

Most people in Northern Ireland thought that democracy was cut into tablets of stone which were handed down and that the instruments of government must be observed. That is not so. The instruments of government are there only because people give their consent to them. We give our consent in the secrecy of the polling booth. We show our acquiesence to being governed and we make our choice about who should govern us or represent us. The right to vote in the Province, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, is the cornerstone of our democracy.

We should be glad that so many people in Northern Ireland still believe in the democratic process, although some of the poll figures cause concern. Whether or not they exercise their right to vote, Northern Ireland people are jealous of that right and of being on the electoral register. To believe that one has only to witness their reaction if they are not on the register, if they do not have a postal vote or if their vote is stolen. They blame the politicians and the political parties. We should be careful not to undermine what is left of the base and foundation of our democracy by interfering with people's cherished rights.

The Statutory Advisory Commission on Human Rights said in chapter 5 of a recent report:

"Members agreed, as a matter of principle, that they disapproved of it being mandatory for voters to produce specific documents as proof of their identity, and they were also of the opinion that it was naive to assume that personators could not acquire these documents for illegal use . . . It should also be emphasised that documents would not be the sole means of proving identity."

I wonder whether the members of that commission have changed their minds because in last year's report they reviewed the position. Did they volunteer a change in opinion or were they unduly influenced? If they changed their opinion, why did they?

[Mr. McCusker]

The Bill was produced as a reaction to Sinn Fein and it is likely to deprive at least some of our people of their rights as it attempts to prevent vote-stealing by Sinn Fein. The full implications have not been thought through.

One of the most chilling comments in the notes on clauses is on page 12 which states:

"no-one will lose the right to be on the electoral register".

Sinn Fein does not threaten anyone's right to be on the electoral register. The document continues:

"But it could result in some people not being able to vote who otherwise would have done, for example if they did not have a document prescribed under rule 37(1A) . . . when they went to the polling station."

The document continues:

"the theoretical possibility exists that on polling day an elector who would otherwise be entitled to vote would not have one of those documents."

That is a casual way to deal with one of the fundamental rights of our people.

The main thrust of the Bill seems to be to ensure that only those who can produce one of a number of documents will be allowed to vote. I believe that anyone who can prove to the satisfaction of the presiding officer that he is the person on the electoral register should be allowed to vote. The right to vote under the Bill is conditional on the production of a document as distinct from proving that the person is the person on the register and has a legitimate right to vote. There is a vast difference because many people will be able to produce a document which will enable them to vote when they are not the person entitled to vote.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) referred to me in his speech. My right hon. Friend will have a mainland Great Britain driving licence, to which no photograph is attached. As I read the Bill, someone who managed to acquire that driving licence by stealing it from a car or picking it up somewhere could go to the polling station and say to the presiding officer, "I am Enoch Powell. There is my driving licence to prove it." The presiding officer would then have to decide whether the document shows that the person in front of him is Enoch Powell. I cannot see how that person can be refused a ballot paper.

We are in danger of giving people the right to vote on the basis of a document and depriving people of the right to vote simply because they do not have a document. I am sure that it will be equally possible to prove beyond doubt that one is entitled to vote and not be given a vote.

I could go along to a polling station without documentation, but be able to prove who I was and where I lived and produce a House of Commons pass. Under the Bill the presiding officer would be obliged to say, "I am sorry, we cannot give you a ballot paper. Go back and acquire one of the prescribed documents." That is incredible. I hope that the Government will reconsider.

Let us look in more detail at the Bill. I have asked questions about driving licences. I asked how many full driving licences with photographs were held in Northern Ireland, and I was told that the figure was a little more than 500,000. Therefore, about half the people on the register could produce a document that would identify them, which would go some way to preventing some abuses.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that provisional licences would be as good as full licences?

Mr. McCusker: That may be the case, but there are remarkably few provisional licences available in Northern Ireland. About 500,000 people do not have driving licences, so they could not produce one when voting. Driving licences are not a sufficient means of identification. Passports could be used, but when I asked the Secretary of State how many passports were held by United Kingdom citizens resident in Northern Ireland, he said, "We do not know." I was also unable to establish how many people hold Irish Republic passports. I understand that fewer people hold Irish Republic passports —fewer than the hon. Member for Foyle would want to believe, but more than Unionist Members would want to believe.

What about the case of a Unionist living in a strong Nationalist area? That person might not want to show his passport on polling day. He might be living quietly in the area, with no one knowing a great deal about him. People will soon know something about him if he has to produce his British passport to vote.

What about a decent, law-abiding Catholic—which most of them are—perhaps working in the Civil Service —as most of them do—carrying a British passport? If that person was voting in Washing Bay, and was a well-liked and respected member of the Catholic community, the production of a British passport would put him in some difficulty. Similarly, a Roman Catholic living in a Loyalist area—again a respected and accepted member of the community — would be expected to hold a British passport. If he produced an Irish passport when he voted, that would be telling many people in the community a great deal about him.

We all know about the abuses of DHSS documents in Northern Ireland, where people obtain funds by fraudulent means. Yet those documents are accepted as proof of identity when money is handed out. Officials accept that the document belongs to the person because it is in his possession. Large sums of money are often involved. Anyone producing such a document at a polling station will have it accepted as identification.

I have a medical card with me. It gives my name—James H. McCusker of 42 Wellington street, Lurgan. It also gives the name of my doctor, R. Pedlow, 60 High street, Lurgan. Because the card has been in use for some time, it has a hole in the middle, so the "H" is not visible. I left that address 20 years ago, and left the following address 10 years ago. The doctor died 20 years ago.

At no time have I suffered because I have not had the card altered. I have always received more than adequate medical attention. There was no incentive to amend the card. I have no incentive to amend it now, other than that I might need it at a polling station because my House of Commons pass will not be accepted as identification.

Both the medical card and DHSS documents are of no real value to someone trying to prove his identity, but they can be of value to someone intent upon personating. I looked at some of my registers. I did not especially select the one from which I want to quote. The first page of this register has, in one column, a number of families with the same name — Noel J. McGrann, Noel J. McGrann; Thomas Devlin, Thomas Devlin; Desmond McCleary, Desmond McCleary. On the next page there is John McGurgan, John McGurgan; Michael O'Hagan, Michael O'Hagan; Thomas O'Connor, Thomas O'Connor; John McKeown, John McKeown; Maureen McKeever, Maureen McKeever.

If some of those people were nursing, at university or too sick to vote, there is nothing to prevent someone using their documentation. My son is also James H. McCusker. I presume that he could use my card as identification. The use of these documents could assist benign personation —where one member of a family felt it obligatory to cast a vote for another member of a family.

The production of marriage lines has already been mentioned. There is something repugnant about asking a woman to produce her marriage lines when she votes. It is asking too much. I felt so strongly about that that I contacted the Equal Opportunities Commission in Northern Ireland. I might have misled it a little as I thought that a woman had to produce both her medical card and her marriage lines. I am glad to know that that is not the case. If my original understanding had been right, the Equal Opportunities Commission said that it would serve an injunction on the Government because a woman should not have to produce her marriage lines.

I still have not been given a satisfactory explanation as to why a woman should be asked to produce her marriage lines. The Equal Opportunities Commission said that she is the same person as she was before her marriage, and can claim her previous name even after her marriage.

I hope that I have managed to convince hon. Members that the Bill is dangerous. Although it may prevent some abuse, it will damage the electoral voting prospects of many others—perhaps more than those affected by vote-stealing.

I hope that no one will say that I am giving the Provisional Sinn Fein ideas. The Bill gives our enemies a potent weapon for disruption. Two hon. Members have described what will happen because of the delay in the usual processes. If Sinn Fein cannot steal someone's vote, it will be as good to prevent someone from voting for another party. I think that what I am about to describe is not beyond the bounds of possibility. Let us assume that because of the additional measures the number of booths would have to be doubled, as would the number of people employed — although £50,000 does not leave a great deal of scope for that.

Let us suppose that there are 50 dedicated Sinn Fein supporters in one area who all join together on the morning of an election and swap their medical cards, 25 for 25. Let us suppose also that the 50 go to the polling station and cast 50 votes. The consequence of that will be that 25 will personate the other 25. There will be no reason why they should be challenged at the time of voting. They will be able to return their medical cards to one another outside the polling station. There will be legitimate delays, and at about half-past six, seven o'clock or half-past seven in the evening a series of Provisional Sinn Fein supporters will enter the polling station. They will be in possession of their own medical cards or DHSS booklets, for example. Each one will set down his document and say, "That is me." The presiding officer will say, "I am sorry, but your vote has already been cast."

The House will be able to imagine how long it would take in those circumstances to deal with their synthetic indignation and protests. They would produce other evidence to prove that they are who they say they are as stated on the medical cards. They would put the presiding officer to every possible difficulty in invoking the tendered ballot paper procedure. They would tie up the voting machine to such an extent that hundreds could be prevented from voting.

I have been in polling stations in Northern Ireland where the queue has stretched out into the street. Between 9 and 10 o'clock the queue can be as long as 50 or 60. Many of the potential voters are probably already sick of what they understand democracy to be in Northern Ireland, and as it is shown to be in the poll results to which I have referred. Party workers and others will have encouraged them to produce their driving licence or passport, if they are lucky enough to have one, and they will be stuck in a long queue. By 9 or 10 o'clock in the evening many of them will have turned back in any event. We are giving another weapon to the Sinn Fein.

I hope that I shall not be criticised for putting ideas into the heads of Sinn Fein supporters. Let it be understood that they are as capable of exploiting any advantage that we give them as any other group. How can these potential dangers be avoided? We are dealing with Sinn Fein and the Bill has been introduced because of its abuses and threats to legitimate political parties.

Sinn Fein has chosen to exploit the democratic process and perhaps we should consider dealing with Sinn Fein. It could be proscribed if the Government had the courage to take that action. If the Government do not want to do that, they should consider one of the recommendations that is to be found in the Baker report. It is said that Sinn Fein could maintain its legitimacy as a political party but be prevented from fighting an election while it is pledged to support violence. If the Secretary of State has not read that section of the Baker report, I hope that he will address himself to it. If Sinn Fein was put in that position it would not be able to steal votes and there would be no incentive for it to do so.

Perhaps the only other logical alternative is to issue identity cards. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Down has not fully satisfied himself how identity cards can be made foolproof. I do not think any of us have done so. If national insurance numbers were placed on identity cards and on the electoral registers which presiding officers have, that might provide a suitable cross-check. We have considered also some of the suggestions that have been made by the hon. Member for Foyle.

We can turn what is now a victory for Sinn Fein into a defeat if we handle the issue in the proper way. The fact that the Bill has been introduced is a victory for Sinn Fein. The Diplock courts are a victory for Sinn Fein and so are the informer trials. Every infringement of my liberty and the liberty of decent people in Northern Ireland is a victory for Sinn Fein.

If we give a Bill a Second Reading that will prevent ordinary decent people from exercising their franchise, because they do not have the required documents, for example, we shall give Sinn Fein another victory. Surely we should try to deny it that victory. The way to do that would be to accept the recommendation of the Baker report or produce identity cards. The issuing of identity cards may not be favoured in other parts of the United Kingdom but account should be taken of what we in Northern Ireland have had to live with over the past 15 years. Identity cards could preserve the democratic process and assist in overcoming the other abuses involving the social security system. Even better, they could help in the battle against terrorism.

6.36 pm

Mr. John Mark Taylor (Solihull): It is not necessary for the representative of an English constituency to explain

[Mr. John Mark Taylor]

his intervention in a debate on Northern Ireland. The citizens of the Province are the citizens of the same kingdom as I am. Their problems are my problems and the problems of us all and we must all consider them sympathetically and try to be helpful. The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) was right when he said that the Bill concerns us all.

It has often been said that democracy is our strength and our bulwark. The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) made a similar observation. We use these idioms—strengths and bulwarks—as though democracy were immovable and had deep and strong foundations. In fact, the idioms are somewhat deceptive. In many senses democracy is frail. Indeed, it is in need of positive and vigorous protection. It is frail when menaces are used, and the citizens of Northern Ireland understand menaces and intimidation. Democracy is frail when corruption is abroad. It is frail when someone steals another person's vote.

I took note of the words of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights:

"The right to vote is the cornerstone of democracy."

Again, that is the granite idiom. We know what the author meant, but democracy is something more movable than a cornerstone. The chief electoral registration officer for Northern Ireland has spoken of a

"perception of a high level of abuse."

We would probably have to take some steps to put things right and to provide reassurance even if it were only a perception, but it is more than that, and in paragraph 30 the commission refers to

"the need to reassure the electorate of confidence in their democratic institutions"

as one of the first importance. It is more than a perception, but even the perception of abuse is readily illustrated by the fact that over 900, for sure, cast pink votes in Northern Ireland in the general election. Those are the 900 who were prepared in the presence of others to record their indignation at having lost their votes. Some, having learnt that they had lost their votes, would have been annoyed but would have withdrawn. Those people might have been timid or they might have made a prudent calculation that the odds in their community were against them and that they were not looking for trouble.

There are other abuses, but at present I am speaking only of the stealing of votes. The measurement of 900 is the minimum for one of the abuses.

We have learnt that the documents are still available for further consideration, and that the list of categories may be changed in some way. A current driving licence has limited usefulness. Not all citizens possess a driving licence. It is possible to lose a licence because some traffic offence was committed. Paradoxically, a person who commits a traffic offence may hazard his vote as well. Remarks have been made about using a passport or pension book, but not everyone has one.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) dealt extensively with medical cards. Before I heard what the hon. Gentleman said, I was tempted to suggest that a photograph should be attached to the medical card. The medical card would say nothing about the citizen's politics or allegiance. A passport refers to allegiance, but a medical card gives away nothing about allegiance. A medical card with an attached photograph might provide an answer. We would have to consider updating the photograph, lest that politician's vanity of addressing himself by an old photograph creeps into the system.

I am less puzzled than other Members about the use of the marriage certificate. There comes a time—weeks or months—for every woman when the name by which she knows herself differs from the name on the electoral roll. Since she wishes to call herself by her new name in her new state, her marriage lines provide the reconciliation of what she thinks she is called and what the electoral register says. I should not like to look for anything discriminatory in this issue. The marriage certificate does not cause a problem, and indeed, is one of the more helpful inclusions in the list.

Mr. William Ross: What about a woman who does not have marriage lines?

Mr. Taylor: Presumably, a common law wife has a name by which she is usually known, which would be the name that would appear on the electoral register. She would have fewer problems than the woman who had recently married — *[Interruption.]* I cannot take the intervention of the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) from a sedentary position.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the hon. Member for Solihull agree with me that the certificate of marriage signed by the officiating officer, as with the regular certificate used for all other purposes in Northern Ireland, should be used rather than the certificate issued by the Registrar-General of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman made that point forcefully when he addressed the Chamber. I concede that I understand the problem without having an answer readily at my grasp. I am not completely au fait with the rules for the registration of marriage in Northern Ireland. In fairness to the hon. Gentleman, I must say that at first blush I found his argument convincing.

I have been tempted to ask, to conclude my contribution to the discussion about lists, why the birth certificate was not among the candidate documents. There is a case for including it in the list. The birth certificate is one of the most fundamental documents for identification.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Nicholas Scott): One can obtain a copy of the hon. Gentleman's birth certificate at any time on payment of a modest fee.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman may have already studied the objection. His findings may provide a complete objection to my suggestion. I believe that the Government Front Bench agrees that the debate about the list is far from its conclusion. No doubt a number of suggestions will be made.

Since this is a Second Reading debate, I shall trespass and offer the opinion that another democratic entity that needs our encouragement is the Northern Ireland Assembly. Many of us in Britain would like that Assembly to prosper, acquire competence and functions and develop regular questioning of Northern Ireland Ministers. My sentiments about personation are directed as much to elections to that Assembly as to general elections in Northern Ireland and elections to the European Parliament.

As one of the two John Taylors in the House, I am well aware of some of the consequences of mistaken identity.

If I lack my namesake's native depth of knowledge of Northern Ireland experience, I certainly do not lack his correspondence. It takes me only a few lines of reading to realise apologetically that the correspondence is not for me. There are certainly colourful letters. Sometimes letters come from Philadelphia—a remarkable address for mail for the hon. Member for Solihull. As an Englishman called John Taylor, I understand the problem caused by an electoral roll, which was produced by the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker), which shows the commonality of names in Northern Ireland communities.

I hope that I do not lack a proper awareness of the fact that, if cheating and malpractice interfere with democratic elections in some parts of our country, the Government must act to put things right. The House should support the Government in doing so. A difference of philosophy has been shown in this debate. There are those hon. Members like myself and the hon. Member for Upper Bann—I cannot claim to speak for the hon. Gentleman—who would prefer some improvements to be made now. There are others who would like the matter to be treated once and for all. As an Englishman considering Northern Ireland affairs, perhaps I do not fully understand Northern Ireland politics. I readily concede that this is almost certainly because I have not had the advantage of living in the Province all my life; I have only been a visitor. Sometimes Northern Ireland politics seem to be rather negative.

I see an identified, obvious and undesirable abuse that we should put right. The Government are bringing forward the beginnings of a means to improve the position. The solution may not be absolute—indeed, it does not go as far as identity cards would—or sufficiently constitutionally elegant to satisfy some hon. Members. The hon. Member for Upper Bann thought that the measure would deter some personation, and I suspect that it will. The legislation will be good if it does so. We should note how the measure goes. It will be splendid if it is successful. If a further case for identity cards emerges, the Government and their supporters will have been shown to have been too optimistic, and the Government will be obliged to take further action. I shall be one of the first to ask the Government to take that further action. Having listened to this debate—I shall listen to the other contributions—I am disposed at this stage, on the balance of the argument, to support the Government.

6.49 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I was somewhat taken aback when the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) wished the Secretary of State well in his new post. I also, of course, wish him well in his new post, but having seen so much of him so often over the past few weeks I had forgotten that he was a new boy. He can no longer be regarded as such. He has had little comfort during the debate. He need not expect any from me, because the net effect of the Bill, were it to be an Act today and were today to be polling day, would be that I should not be entitled to vote despite the fact that the notes on clauses presented to those hon. Members who sought a copy from the Vote Office say that the Bill does not directly bear on the franchise. It does. If it denies me my vote, it bears upon the franchise. Later I shall tell the Secretary of State how it denies me my vote.

Personation should be dealt with. Here I agree with almost every right hon. Member who has spoken. There is too much personation in Northern Ireland. I do not take the luxury of dividing it into two sections — the personation of those who are dead and those who could not go out to vote, and the personation of the votes of those who would have voted had it not been that their vote was stolen. One category is as wrong as the other. I would make no excuse for either. Let every party in the House, whether it be Conservative, Labour or any Northern Ireland party, admit that few of us could say with hand on heart that we know of no case of a vote cast for our parties in that manner. I am sure that every one of us knows that it has happened on one or more occasions, no matter how much we may disapprove of it.

However, we must recognise that the problem of personation is not unique or peculiar to Northern Ireland. It occurs elsewhere in the United Kingdom. I recall many conversations with hon. Members with constituencies on the mainland—as we term it—who have told me of instances of personation in their constituencies. The fact that the Bill is unique and peculiar to Northern Ireland shows that the Government have deemed that there is an acceptable level of personation. We might also say that they have deemed that there is an acceptable level of some other activities. It is all right to have some personation in parts of the United Kingdom, but when it reaches a certain level we must take action.

I might argue, as the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) did, that there are many constituencies within Northern Ireland where there is a low rate of personation. I am glad to say that my constituency is one of them. I believe that no more than a handful of the pink voting papers were issued. Whether it was right to do it or not, the Secretary of State will probably find that most, if not all, of those pink papers were given because the presiding officer had in front of him a voter who went to the polling station and found that his name was not on the electoral list. He was given a pink slip to quieten him down because he was kicking up such a din in the polling station. He thought therefore that he had voted. It may not have been proper for the presiding officer to do that, but I think that it probably happened in many constituencies to get the man out through the door.

I understand the dilemma of those hon. Members who face personation on a wide scale. It is that category that needs action. Personation can affect the result of elections in Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for Upper Bann said—and I agree with him—that no case could be cited of a parliamentary election being won because of personation. As the hon. Member who in 1979 had perhaps the narrowest margin of victory in Northern Ireland's electoral history—I was elected by 64 votes—I am glad to hear him say that. At least it kept me clear, but, having a narrow voting margin of 64 for election to the House, I recognise that there are other constituencies where an election could be won or lost by votes stolen or personated in some other way.

I think of the electoral area represented by my colleague, the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea). He has a majority of 74 votes over, yes, Sinn Fein, the very people whom we would expect the Bill to deal with. Plainly in 1983, when the election to the House took place, Sinn Fein was working hard at personating in Mid-Ulster. It was only 75 votes off winning the election. I suggest that it will work all the harder at the next Westminster election to see whether it can obtain those

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

extra votes. Let us not think that it is impossible for an election to be swayed by the additional votes cast by those who are using personation.

There are several other constituencies where the result could be tight at the next election. Newry and Armagh would be one and Fermanagh and South Tyrone would be another. Who knows what the division in Belfast, West might cause? Those constituencies might be swung by personation. Elections other than those to this House frequently take place in Northern Ireland but under a voting system different from that used in the rest of the United Kingdom — proportional representation. I can recall an election in the south-west Belfast area where a handful of votes decided that Sinn Fein was elected. In proportional representation elections it is all the more important that restrictions are applied to ensure that the electoral system is not abused.

I have every sympathy with those who protest that Sinn Fein, and perhaps some other individuals, used this illegal activity. I want, as they do, to find a mechanism to stop that abuse.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that you would not suggest that the reason why personation may pertain more in Northern Ireland than anywhere else in the United Kingdom is that there are more dishonest people in Northern Ireland than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. My experience on the mainland suggests that there is probably little difference. However, if there is, honesty bears in favour of the people of Northern Ireland. I am receiving some strange looks, so perhaps I had better clarify that remark. My experience of the mainland extends outside the House; I am not reflecting upon the integrity of any hon. Member, but that suggestion does not explain the mass personation in Northern Ireland constituencies.

I, and I am sure other Northern Ireland Members, might like to suggest that one of the reasons is that we are such colourful, likeable and charismatic characters that people are not satisfied with voting for us once; they favour us so greatly that they must vote for us many times. That may not be all of the truth. The reason may be that politics in Northern Ireland are taken a great deal more seriously than they are in other parts of the United Kingdom. That is why what the hon. Member for Upper Bann described as the more acceptable form of personation takes place—there is great loyalty to the individual and to the party which causes people to blind themselves to what is right in voting practice and to do that which they should not.

The second category of personation—vote stealing—is indulged in by those people who wish not to use the electoral system but to abuse it. After all, if people are prepared to try to gain victory by shooting others, it will cause them little thought if they try to gain victory by personation. That is a major problem in many areas of Northern Ireland.

I have some difficulty in persuading myself that it is right to introduce such a Bill as this solely for Northern Ireland. The franchise in Northern Ireland is exercised through different systems of voting in different elections. It can be argued that any election is unique to Northern Ireland; it is a Northern Ireland-only election. The system that is adopted might be different from that operating elsewhere in the United Kingdom. All those elected to the body concerned should be elected in exactly the same manner. However, when people in constituencies in this part of the United Kingdom are allowed to vote without giving any identification, but voters in Northern Ireland are treated in a different way, when it is the same body, I find some difficulty in squaring that with the parity that should exist in electoral law throughout the United Kingdom.

I would even be prepared to thole all that, to use an Ulster expression, if I thought that the mechanism to be employed would work. I refer to the Secretary of State's attempt to disfranchise me in Northern Ireland. I said at the beginning of my speech that if the Bill were an Act, and if it had been polling day, I would not be entitled to vote. If the notes on clauses were the guidelines for the presiding officer, under the Act he would be acting outside the law if he recognised me as Peter Robinson and gave me a ballot paper. The presiding officer could give me a ballot paper only if I produced one of the items on the list, such as a medical card. I have one—I got it out last night. I have moved house five times since I lived at the address on the medical card. If I went to the polling station and asked for my ballot paper on producing my medical card, the presiding officer would see that it did not bear the same address as that on the electoral register, and he would not be entitled to do anything other than refuse me my ballot paper.

However, I have a driving licence. It has a photograph on it that would show the presiding officer that I am Peter Robinson. However, again the problem is that I have moved house in the past few weeks. The address on my driving licence is not the same as the address on the electoral register because the register has continuous registration. I do not want to hand in my driving licence until the period for the fee that I have paid——

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that that is not the best example to quote, because he is acting illegally? He is breaking the law if he does not say that he has changed his address.

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman obviously is not——

Mr. Brown: I am talking about a driving licence for Great Britain.

Mr. Robinson: The question is whether I use my driving licence. I do not because I do not drive. I have a driving licence, can drive, but do not. Therefore, I do not need to change the address on my driving licence.

Therefore, again, the presiding officer would not be able to give me a ballot paper although he recognised me and would be prepared to give one to me. I also have a passport, and it does not have an address, but I have the same problem as the hon. Member for Upper Bann. In Northern Ireland, it is common that the name of the son is the same as the name of the father, with a middle name put in. The hon. Member for Upper Bann said that his medical certificate stated that his name was "James H. McCusker". My name is David Peter Robinson. There was some confusion around my house when the name David was called when we had to do the dishes, and nobody got up. So I became known as Peter. For electoral purposes, I am known as Peter Robinson, but my passport says David Robinson. Therefore, if I produce my passport to the presiding officer, no doubt he will say that I am not entitled to a ballot paper, and that he is not allowed to give

it to me because there is some doubt in his mind about whether I am entitled to vote when the electoral register says Peter Robinson.

Perhaps that is a unique case, but anyone who has moved house and not changed his documents but whose address has been changed through continuous registration, will be disfranchised unless he can meet the criteria by some means of identification that does not bear an address. That can be only the passport, and nobody knows how many passports are issued to Northern Ireland citizens.

It is strange for the Government to suggest that suitable identification would consist of a document with anything less on it than the name, address, photograph and signature of the individual. Unless the document has all four details, the vote could be given to the wrong person. I can draw only one conclusion from that. There is not one document in the list in the notes on clauses that falls into that category, yet I should have thought that it was essential to have each of those four, and certainly three—the name, address and photograph of the individual—to ensure that the person getting the ballot paper was the person whose name was on the electoral register.

However, the Secretary of State seems unwilling to allow a document to be produced that would give every elector the right to have such identification. It could be done. I would even accept it if it were only for Northern Ireland, although I would prefer it if it were for the whole of the United Kingdom. What is the Secretary of State's excuse for not being prepared to have separate identification for elections? It is that some people may not want it. I wonder who they would be. They would be the very people voting once, twice, three times and perhaps a lot more. Those are the only people I can think of who would refuse to have such identification at elections. I think, as the Secretary of State does, that some politicians in Northern Ireland, if not the United Kingdom, might want it to be used for other purposes such as security.

If it is to be a worthwhile identification, it must have all four ingredients that I mentioned. In the past few years presiding officers have laboured under severe difficulties. I know of several who must know of individuals who come in more than once to vote. They know it but are afraid to do anything about it. Will they do something about it if the person comes in and presents a fake form of identification? Will that make them have the courage to take action? I doubt it. If the Secretary of State turns his back on all of us who say, "Think again about a proper means of ensuring that personation is reduced," let him at least find some way of ensuring that people such as those in the security forces can participate in checking the identification. They would be less likely to be in fear of taking action against those who personate. There might be considerable difficulties in involving the security forces, but unless we have that involvement there will still be the possibility that either clerks or presiding officers will find it difficult—they might live in the areas from which those men come — to take the action that the law requires.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann suggested that more power should perhaps be given to the presiding officer to accept the evidence of his eyes as much as the documentation before him. That sounds like common sense, but it can be done only if there is security protection for the individual who has to judge whether the would-be voter is entitled to vote. Otherwise, the officer might be persuaded by matters other than reason and logic to hand over a ballot paper.

On the subject of delays, I wonder how many polling stations in Northern Ireland have been visited by the Secretary of State, other Ministers or the people who drafted the legislation. In an election lasting 12 hours, from 8 am to 8 pm, especially the first under this legislation, about one third of the people coming to vote will probably have to come to the polling station twice before they can register their votes. There will be delays involved in searching for the documentation and checking identification. The clerk may wish to bring the presiding officer in for consultation. Moreover, under PR there would be a number of names on the ballot paper. Given the queues that already exist on such occasions, will everyone who wishes be able to vote? I doubt very much whether the Secretary of State could achieve that and remain within the £50,000 financial consequences identified in the explanatory memorandum because unless there are more polling stations with more staff the existing time scale will not be sufficient.

One type of document suggested for indentification purposes is a book for payment of certain allowances. I have had great difficulty in persuading many of my constituents to claim the benefits to which they are entitled. They have been very embarrassed at doing so and I very much doubt whether they would be prepared to produce their payment books to show the presiding officer or clerk when neighbours may be standing behind them in the queue.

All in all, I believe that the effectiveness of the Bill would be extremely low, although the welcome increases in penalties for impersonation might assist in reducing the number of people prepared to indulge in the practice. I suspect, however, that many IRA voters — I do not distinguish between them and Sinn Fein—would not be deterred by a six-month sentence or the kind of fine suggested in the notes on clauses.

Rev. Martin Smyth: How would the penalties be implemented if the person involved withdrew his claim when challenged?

Mr. Robinson: The constables will no doubt have power to stop people withdrawing. The presiding officer, however, may wish to give the person a second chance, as the notes on clauses magnanimously provide—"If at first you don't succeed, try, try again!" If the presiding officer is prepared to let the person have another go and wishes to send him off to fetch some appropriate documents while the constable wishes to restrain that person, one wonders what the result will be. Perhaps time will tell.

Although the Bill will undoubtedly make impersonation more difficult, it will make things equally difficult for the genuine voter whom we wish to encourage to exercise his or her franchise. We need legislation that will not penalise those who are entitled to exercise the franchise and wish to do so but will catch those attempting to exercise someone else's franchise. I believe in the principle of one man, one vote in this case. Funnily enough, however, those who a few years ago were on the streets demanding just that now seek half a dozen or more. I have pleasure in supporting the amendment.

7.16 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), who has now left, said that there was a difference of philosophy in the debate. I believe that he was wrong. It is not a difference of philosophy. It is a difference of perception between those who represent constituencies in Great Britain and have no knowledge of personation in Ireland, whether in Northern Ireland or in the Republic, and those of us who live in Northern Ireland and have had to deal with the problem on the doorstep. It is that difference of perception, understanding and experience that sets us apart from the Government on this. I hope that in the light of this debate the Government will take the Bill away and think the whole matter through, which they apparently have not done so far. Certainly that is the impression that Northern Ireland Members received when listening to the Secretary of State.

When I first went into politics I cut my teeth keeping electoral registers right, on local elections and on being a party political organiser in my area. That was on an entirely voluntary basis but it involved taking a great deal of interest in the whole process of running elections and ensuring that my numerous political enemies did not personate. I therefore speak as one with far greater experience of this matter than most other Members because the area in which I lived then and still live now is dominated by Republicans and we have always suspected considerable personation. We thus had not only to take cognizance of that possibility but to take steps to prevent it happening, which I believe in large measure we did.

We should be clear about the reasons for the Bill. It is to stop the electoral advance of Sinn Fein. But for that perceived electoral advance, the Bill would not have been introduced and this debate would not be taking place. It is also, as a side issue, to save the bacon of the SDLP from the electoral advance of Sinn Fein.

We have heard the myth of the 20,000 impersonated votes. A number of hon. Members have touched on this but I wish to go into it again. Twenty thousand impersonated votes is 20 per cent., or one in five, of the votes cast for Sinn Fein. That is a very high percentage. I think that it would have been impossible for that number of votes to be personated, especially as the alleged personations were not spread evenly over the Province; they took place in relatively small areas and among relatively small sections of the total population.

Perhaps we should look again at the constituencies involved. One that has been mentioned several times is the constituency of Foyle, which is in my part of the world. Personation in the Foyle did not cover the whole of Foyle, but only Creggan, the Bogside, Cornhill and Shantallow—the west bank of the Foyle. We are asked to believe that the Social Democratic and Labour party is so inefficient in that area as to allow mass personation to take place, and yet the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), who is the leader of that party, has told us how effective his party members were on that morning, when they turned away 50 people out of every 700.

What is the effect in the polling stations of the turning away of attempted personators? They go out and tell their friends that the game is not worth the candle because they are being challenged. There is a perception on the part of the lawbreaker about whether he will get away with it.

I do not believe that 20,000 personated votes were cast for Sinn Fein. It is a marvellous story to tell in an effort to downgrade the achievement of Sinn Fein, but I do not believe that it is true.

The hon. Member for Foyle referred to the militaristic organisation of the personation. Of course it was militaristic. That is how Sinn Fein and the IRA organise themselves. There is a carefully organised and co-ordinated campaign which can be very difficult to stop —but, none the less, it can be stopped.

What are the essentials for stopping personation? The first essential is an accurate electoral register. Despite all the nice things which are said about the electoral register today and the glowing reports put out each year by the chief electoral registration officer, I do not believe that the electoral register in Northern Ireland is one iota more satisfactory or accurate than it was before the present electoral registration system was set up.

In the old days, the electoral registration system worked through local officials — usually members of local government such as county officials—and through the intense activity of the political parties. Every political party did a certain amount of electoral registration work. When one lives and works in the places in Northern Ireland where I and some of my most energetic and assiduous colleagues have lived and worked, one makes blooming sure that the register is right. We do it street by street, name by name and house by house. We do it well, because we know the people there. The population is not so large that we are incapable of identifying the vast majority of the people. What Sinn Fein and the IRA fear more than anything else is the knowledge of the community in which they operate being in the hands of their foes. The 90 or 100 Protestant households in the Creggan estate left that estate within a few weeks of the explosion of trouble in 1969. The resulting absence of local knowledge is the reason why, ever since that time, it has been difficult for those of us engaged in that work—and my own party does much of the work for the Unionist community — to operate in that area.

I used to have my network of men and women who were not known as party workers. I visited them two or three times a year with a register in my hand and asked them to tell me which of their neighbours had died and which had left, and we were able to correct the register. Political parties in Great Britain probably do not go to those lengths. Perhaps they do not have the incentive that party workers in Northern Ireland have always had and still have. The whole concept of compiling an accurate register is difficult in a community which is solidly Roman Catholic or Protestant because, in general terms, the opposing factions are not willing or able to operate efficiently in such areas. However, there are ways in which one can compile a fairly accurate register. Most of Northern Ireland is a mixed community in which it is possible for both sections of the community to operate, and they do it assiduously and well.

In the city of Londonderry, there was at one time an organisation known as the Catholic Registration Society. It was run, virtually, by the Roman Catholic Church. The society corrected the registers with the aid of paid staff and handed them over to the nationalist party as soon as an election was called. That organisation has disappeared, and I do not believe that the present system gives us a register which is as accurate.

There was a tremendous amount of co-operation between all the political parties in those days in order to arrive at an accurate register. There is still co-operation in many parts of the Province. No party benefits, especially at present, from the appearance on the register of numbers of people who do not exist. It is in the interests of all parties to have a register which is as accurate as possible.

Not all my hon. Friends agree with me, but I believe that one of the most serious mistakes of recent years in the compilation of electoral registers is the concept of permanent registration. It is almost impossible for the political parties, which do an enormous amount of the work, to keep up with the constant checking that is necessary. They do not have a paid staff. The work is done on a voluntary basis, and it is as if 15 September arrived every month. It is very difficult indeed.

There is only one really good way to stop personation at polling stations, and that is to put people there who know their neighbours. In most parts of Northern Ireland, there are personation agents or representatives in the polling station who make sure that personation does not take place. The odd case may slip through—cases such as my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. McCusker) has described—but it is a minor problem, and always has been. In a mixed community, massive personation is frankly impossible, as anyone who has worked in the field knows. The Social Democratic and Labour party apparently had difficulty on the west bank of the Foyle in Londonderry but the leader of that party has told us that the party was able, in large measure, to put a stopper on the problem. Despite the early success of Sinn Fein and all its efforts, I believe that Sinn Fein did not do quite as well as it had expected out of personation. Of course there was much more personation than usual, but it would be wrong to believe that one vote in every two or three cast for Sinn Fein in that relatively small area was personated, which would have had to be the case if Sinn Fein was to gain 20,000 votes over the whole country. We must forget about the majority of the country and bring those 20,000 people to the areas where Sinn Fein was well organised and could do it on a fairly large scale. I would have accepted a figure of 5,000, or possibly even 10,000, but 20,000 is not possible. It can only be done in the areas in which Sinn Fein works freely.

Has any hon. Member thought about the size of the operation that would be necessary if a political body, or even a militaristic body like Sinn Fein, were to get 20,000 votes from the 600,000 vote cast? It would have to be a bigger operation than the entire election campaign. It could not be done, and it was not done.

The Bill was written by people who believe that they know about personation and how it is carried out, but they do not know. They do not know because they have not been down in the gutter fighting for their political lives against the personators. They do not know what it is about. They have listened to the stories, the myths and the nonsense that has been talked, but they have never been in a polling station trying to stop personation and they have never organised a political party to try to stop it. Only those who have been in the gutter fighting those people know how difficult it can be made for them.

Hon. Members have not yet mentioned the fact that there will be a shift of responsibility from the political parties to the presiding officers to ensure that such evils do not occur. I am not against a presiding officer's powers being increased, but generally speaking the most effective presiding officer is a teacher from the school in which the polling station is set up. During the past two elections in Northern Ireland there seemed to be a tendency to move many presiding officers from the school where they taught and from the communities where they knew electors. That was wrong. It would be much better to keep those people on home ground where they know the electorate; that of itself is an inhibiting factor to the personating groups.

We should try to use local people as much as possible, but we will put the brakes on personation only if the community and the political parties are prepared to challenge their enemies and to defeat them. It is not easy, but who said that staying free was easy? Who said that democracy was obtained easily? I can tell the House that when democracy is attacked, it is not easily retained. We have to fight for it and get down into the gutter where those people live and stop them. We must do it ourselves, because no one else will do it for us. The political parties of Ulster, and no one else, will stop personation. We can be helped, but the only aids that would work are those that were described earlier by my right hon. and hon. Friends and by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson).

Personation occurs mainly in constituencies where the outcome of an election is in doubt. Who would bother with personation in a constituency such as Antrim, South or in several other constituencies when they know that the majorities are so massive that my hon. Friends would win no matter what? The only places where they try are those where there is doubt. That is where we must have positive identification that ties the individual to the name on the electoral register. It is daft to say to presiding officers, "We know that you know three quarters or 90 per cent. of the people who come through the polling station, but you cannot give them ballot papers if they do not have the specified documents." The plain truth is that the presiding officer of the clerk knows Willie Ross when he walks through the door of Dungivan school. Would he not look stupid refusing to give me a ballot paper, if I said, "I am sorry, but I cannot show you my driving licence"? Indeed, I could not at the moment, because I lost it three weeks ago and I must apply for another. My hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann had a 20-year-old medical card. He is lucky. I have not seen my medical card for more than 20 years, and although I have not moved house, I do not know where it is.

We should be honest about the fact that the Bill is designed to defeat Sinn Fein. We want to defeat the front men for the gun carriers and the murderers. I agree with that, but the Bill will not defeat them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann said, the Sinn Fein vote has increased and is always there. The Secretary of State might be interested to know the results of general elections in Northern Ireland during the past 30 years. In 1950, two Sinn Fein candidates got 23,000 votes. In 1955, when Sinn Fein was the only nationalist party standing, it got 152,000 votes for 12 candidates. In 1959, after the IRA had started the 1956-61 murder campaign, 12 Sinn Fein candidates got 63,000 votes. In 1968, 14 candidates received 102,000 votes.

In Northern Ireland, there has always been a potential Sinn Fein vote of between 70,000 and 120,000. The figure varies depending on the circumstances or the time, but it has not changed much during the past 30 or 40 years, and there is no reason to believe that it will change. It grows and diminishes, but it does not do so because actual Sinn Fein support grows or diminishes; it does so because of the

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circumstances, the other candidates, and the perception of the electorate as to which candidate of their general tribe is the more likely to win.

Another way of defeating Sinn Fein, which should be put into effect, whether or not identity cards are introduced, is to get rid of proportional representation. The system has allowed extremists to say to the population, "Vote for me first, but in case I do not do well you should go down the line and make sure that the person with the views closest to mine wins." Sinn Fein has been allowed to exploit to the maximum its latent support in the community by this means.

If we return to the first-past-the-post system, elections will be a bit of a mess at first, but less of a mess thereafter. If we are to get rid of Sinn Fein, let us start squeezing them where it hurts—let us squeeze the people who vote for them and let us make them make the choice. At the end of the day, the people in the community will group round their natural centre and if that is to the right of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), that is a matter of small concern to me. On the other hand, his persuasive powers are such that he might still represent the majority view of his party. If the Government are intent on beating Sinn Fein into the earth, as they say they are, they should take the steps that will start doing that.

The Bill has been introduced with the most astonishing haste and is being shoved through the House far too quickly, before either the Secretary of State or the House has had time to think the thing through to see whether it will have the desired effect. It is a case of, "Let us do something—it does not matter what, but we must be seen to do something." That is worse than doing nothing at all, because things that do not succeed in doing good can succeed in doing harm. We have seen that time and again.

For heaven's sake, let us stand back look at the problem and think again. Will the Secretary of State not be too dogmatic, because what is at stake is the democratic process in Northern Ireland? At the end of the day, the welfare of the people of Northern Ireland depends on him. Will he stand back and spend his weekend reading what has been said by hon. Members today and then think again and change his mind?

I am not saying this in any party political sense. What I am saying springs from a deep and enduring understanding of the way of life in Ulster, of the activities of those who personate and the desires and the efforts of Sinn Fein to destroy democracy. I want to see the would-be destroyers destroyed, rather than being rendered victors through a mistaken, misguided effort in this place.

7.42 pm

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): I apologise for being absent for part of the debate. There have been some elections in another part of the Palace of Westminster, in which personation is completely impossible.

The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) and the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) both gracefully complimented my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and welcomed him to his responsibilities. My right hon. Friend's hon. Friends would not wish to be backward in also wishing him well, and we shall help him as best we may.

There is general consent for the purpose of the Bill. The House wants personation stopped wherever it may appear, in elections in any part of the United Kingdom. The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) made an impressive speech and implied that this is really a Bill to stop Sinn Fein, rather than personation. The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) is not here, although he has spoken. I make no complaint about his absence, but I thought that he was the main, if not the only, begetter of this legislation. His party has been the most vociferous in demanding action.

The *Irish News* of 2 November reported that Mr. Joe Hendron, the SDLP Assembly Member for West Belfast said:

"The many thousands of people who have had their votes stolen in recent elections will be delighted at the good news"—of the Bill—

"as also will the hundreds of SDLP personation agents who have been in the frontline attempting to stop personation. The SDLP now looks forward to fair elections and the verdict of the people in 1985."

The House should be glad to respond to the desire of constitutional nationalists, and also of other democratic parties, to be able to compete on fair terms for the votes of the electorate. It is true that there are now those in the political arena who are concerned neither for democratic process nor for democracy. Provisional Sinn Fein is determined—this is the burden of the SDLP complaint—to replace constitutional nationalism by revolutionary republicanism, not just in the Six Counties but in the 26 counties. The not honourable but absent Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams) called those 26 counties a potato republic.

In Northern Ireland, the Provisional Sinn Fein boasts of pursuing its aim and imposing its will by a dual policy of blood and ballot: the Armalite in one hand and in the other a ballot paper—one's own, or somebody else's, be he dead or alive. The Provisional Sinn Fein is an elitist conspiracy against parliamentary government and representative democracy, so one should not be surprised if the Provisional Sinn Fein, with its increasing efficiency and organisation, has elevated the old practice of personation to a higher plane of organised malpractice.

However, we must not think of it just in terms of the grievances of the SDLP. Concern is felt by all constitutional parties and honest citizens who wish to protect the probity of the electoral system. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights and some hon. Friends and I myself met its chairman, Mr. James O'Hara, only the other day. The commission has recommended a measure on the lines of this Bill. In its report, dated 1 October, in paragraph 27 I find these words:

"At the Northern Ireland Assembly election, 26 persons were arrested (mostly in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone and the Belfast North and Belfast West constituencies) for the alleged offence of personation and 762 tendered ballot papers were issued (mostly in the Belfast North and Belfast West constituencies). The Commission understand that 149 persons were arrested on polling day of the last general election and of these 108 were subsequently charged. The number of tendered ballot papers issued was 949, more than half of which were in the constituencies of Foyle and Belfast West."

The Secretary of State has said that about 20 to 25 per cent. of the Sinn Fein's vote can be accounted for in terms of malpractice.

Mr. Beggs: We have heard the last comment several times. Is it not conceivable that, so that the SDLP can

disguise that it has done so badly and that its former supporters were really Sinn Fein supporters, it has made the excuse that the votes were lost by personation?

Sir John Biggs-Davison: I was merely quoting to the House the figure which I heard the Secretary of State give us, that there was this very high proportion of fraudulent votes cast for provisional Sinn Fein.

We heard the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross). We have now heard the intervention from the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs). It would be helpful to the House if we could have some further comment from my hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott) if he seeks to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This is the Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill. The Gracious Speech foreshadowed and the Secretary of State mentioned today a Representation of the People Bill. That will be a United Kingdom measure. The question in my mind is why the provisions in this Bill could not have been included in the Representation of the People Bill ahead of us.

It is not as though personation is confined to Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for Londonderry, East suggested that those of us representing seats in Great Britain had no acquaintance with personation. But we have. I remember in the last general election one of the leading Conservative councillors on the Epping Forest district council going to her polling station only to find that her vote had already been recorded. For such cases as come to light there are many others. This is an abuse which occurs in every part of the United Kingdom and in some parts of the United Kingdom more than others.

To legislate as though the abuse were confined to Northern Ireland makes people unfamiliar with the Province imagine it as at best eccentric and at worst almost ungovernable, whereas those who go there—and more hon. Members should go there—prepared for their visits only by what they see or hear on the mass media express surprise that so much of life is so normal and that so many people are completely law abiding at election times as well as at other times.

It has been suggested that personation in Great Britan is an Irish custom which has accompanied immigration from Ireland and elsewhere. Be that as it may, I deprecate the persistence of successive Governments in the unnecessary duplication of legislation by the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

Government supporters are always being told that it is the aim of our leaders and of our Whips to have a lighter legislative programme. I think that it is the temptation of Whips sometimes to keep the boys busy. So we legislate on dog licences first for Northern Ireland and then for Great Britain.

In this case, is Northern Ireland being used as the laboratory for an experiment, to be followed by similar legislation for Great Britain? Is that perhaps what is in the minds of the Northern Ireland Office, or is it just one more example of the differentiation of Northern Ireland from Great Britain, which is so injurious to the cause of the Union and to morale in Ulster? Is it part of that obsession in the Northern Ireland Office with the separate sanctity of the Northern Ireland statute book — what might almost be described as a bureaucratic Sinn Fein? I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will understand that this treatment of Northern Ireland as a special case—an extraordinary province different if not all that distant from Wales, Scotland and England—causes Unionists to mistrust the professions that we are always hearing that the Union is safe. This in turn impedes good relations with Dublin by rendering suspect the most innocent and mutually advantageous intergovernmental exchanges.

Since personation is not confined to one province of the United Kingdom, there could be a single Bill in which the matter was dealt with, and this is not such a Bill. I do not see on the Treasury Bench any Minister from the Home Office, but I imagine that the Home Office is studying the Bill and what may follow from it.

Some years ago I proposed that every citizen should provide himself or herself with an identity card bearing his or her photograph and signature. I was denounced for fascist tendencies by the *Daily Mirror*, and I have been denounced today by the Liberal party. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) said that on no account would the people of the United kingdom tolerate any return to identity cards.

When identity cards were voluntary in this place, I obtained one. I found it useful and convenient and a protection. I found it useful to be able to identify myself rather than to have laboriously to satisfy vigilant security people that I meant no harm and would do no damage. Are we in this place second-class citizens—we who have by resolution of the house decided that we should have identity cards?

Some form of identification bearing the holder's signature and photograph is the key to the identification of a voter in an election. It would be much better to have a single document to check the bona fides of a voter than the prescribed documents which are mentioned in the notes on clauses, which have been mentioned and circulated by the Secretary of State and which are to be the subject of regulations.

Driving licences have been mentioned in the debate as one of the presented documents. In Northern Ireland at least a driving licence bears a photograph of the holder. But I suppose that there is nothing to stop a voter in Northern Ireland presenting the driving licence that he has acquired while sojourning in Great Britain. Medical cards do not carry photographs, and I ask whether they cannot be easily forged.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) mentioned passports. It will be sufficient to produce a United Kingdom passport or a passport of the Republic of Ireland. Both carry photographs. But there might be some difficulty in strongly Republican areas about producing a United Kingdom passport, and perhaps in strongly Loyalist areas about producing a passport of the Republic of Ireland. Hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies will know better than I whether that is the case.

There is no doubt that the provisions of the Bill will make polling a complicated business. I have seen with my own eyes the queues and the disorder arising from queues at polling stations in the Bogside and the Creggan. I am glad that the Secretary of State said that his mind was not closed and that he would consider all the arguments put forward in the debate.

Clause 6 refers to expense. Although the notes on clauses suggest what might be the additional cost, I think that it will be for the convenience of the House if my hon.

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Friend the Under-Secretary of State tells the House in the Chamber so that it may be on the record what additional staff will be required.

On clause 3, it will also be interesting to know why a person should not be deemed to have committed the offence with which the clause deals if he has possession of documents in advance of polling day. If preparations are being made for massive personation, why will the clause apply only to the possession of documents on the day of polling? There may be a good reason for it, but I shall be glad to hear about it from the Minister. In endorsing the principle of the Bill we must ensure that it is effective. The points that have been raised, while they are Committee points, are of the greatest importance. My question, which I hope my hon. Friend will answer when he replies, is: will it work?

7.59 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) has brought a little more realism to the debate by reminding us that this problem is not peculiar to Northern Ireland. I was interested to hear the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) say that if there were personation in England there would be an outcry. I can assure him that it is not an accepted fact of life when it takes place in Northern Ireland. There is an outcry.

After two recent elections, supporters of the Alliance party came to me angrily because their votes had been pinched. A rector's wife was highly annoyed. Although there has recently been a high number of tendered ballots in West Belfast and Foyle, people do not normally bother because at that stage it is too late anyway. It is only relevant if there is to be an electoral court to test the validity of the election. It must be recognised that to go down that road, as we have discovered, causes other problems. I think of the genuine challenge in Armagh when a candidate was returned who was not validly nominated according to the law of the land. The reaction of the community as a result of that electoral court can still be found to this day.

I do not believe that the practice of personation is a new venture. If my memory is correct, there was an allegation that the former Member for Belfast, West received many personated votes. Evidence was provided, but despite that the matter was never taken to the electoral court because of the psychological obstacle to trying to unseat a person in that way. People imagine that it is a challenge to the vote. We must face that. To say that people can tender a ballot which can then be tested is flying in the face of reality. We should try to deal with the matter a little better.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) has managed to get away from the fog of Belfast. I welcome him on his first appearance on the Opposition Front Bench as a spokesman for Northern Ireland. It was the self-same fog which kept me from being present when the Secretary of State opened the debate. I apologise for the fact that I did not hear all his speech, only the end of it. What I did hear, and the subsequent arguments in the debate, at least encourage me to ask whether the Government, before the Committee stage and before they use their undoubted weight in the House, will think again. While the measure applies to only part of the United Kingdom, it opens up principles which could be applicable to all the United Kingdom. Therefore, I feel strongly that some of the provisions need to be re-examined.

Perhaps on a political level we might be a little more honest than some other parts of the United Kingdom when we recognise the presence of personation. Everyone would like to see it minimised, if not completely obliterated. However, I doubt whether the measures here proposed will accomplish that objective.

Speaker after speaker has pinpointed the haste in presenting the Bill. There has been some improvement in the documents suggested, but we still have at least a reflection of the earlier list that was put out for discussion, when, among other things, a rent book was suggested as a valid document for claiming one's vote. The civil servants who designed that list for the then Secretary of State forgot that in certain parts of Belfast and other parts of Ulster people gladly give away their rent books. It would not necessarily be a valid means of identification.

There is a desire to increase participation by the electorate. Forgive me if I felt a tinge of cynicism when reading some of the background papers and hearing comments in the debate. All that seems to be important is that we have our name on the franchise. If people cannot exercise their vote, that is another matter. It is our obligation to make it easier rather than more difficult for people to exercise their franchise. The bright people in other constituencies of the United Kingdom might have no problems, but I have met constituents going to vote who were unsure whether they could exercise their franchise because they had mislaid their polling cards. If they are sensitive at that level, what will happen if we list a variety of documents that have already been proved incapable of substantiating the identification of a particular person? It will increase the confusion of the average citizen, who will wonder whether he can vote without a particular document.

I at least ask that greater consideration be given to the plea that there should be a common form of identification. It would be useful to have it throughout the United Kingdom. I know that the libertarian lobby will come out against that. But at the heart of our democracy is not only the right to be on the franchise but the right to exercise that franchise if it is to be meaningful. Therefore, if we are to restrict some liberties in Northern Ireland to protect us from some evils, we should at least consider extending that protection throughout the United Kingdom.

The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West expressed concern about the role of the police and the powers of search in the Bill. The clauses dealing with those issues could be misunderstood dramatically by many. On the other hand, I welcome the fact that the Bill gives some power to the police which until now has not obtained in electoral law.

Time and again policemen have been on duty outside polling stations who are trained to observe. They regularly saw people going into polling stations two or three times, but they were not allowed to comment on that fact. Time and again people asked me why the police were not maintaining the law and why they let people into a polling station to vote more than once. The trouble was that the police had no power. That power rested with presiding officers who, for various reasons, failed to issue the

requisite challenges. We must strengthen the power of presiding officers to challenge those whom they suspect of personation.

The Government's proposals will have a minimal effect on the alleged militaristic approach to the stealing of votes. Those who currently abuse the system will speedily devise new methods of abusing it. If we are anxious to deal with those who, in the words of the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) carry the Armalite in one hand and a stolen ballot paper in the other, we must urge the Government to implement the Baker report's recommendation of banning those people from political life until they disown violence. I would go further and proscribe such parties. That would also solve other problems and it would give us time to work out a method of identification to safeguard electors in all parts of the United Kingdom. The Government's blunt instrument will be counter-productive in the long run.

8.12 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): The Bill, which I support in principle, has been introduced with the best of intentions. The previous Secretary of State for Northern Ireland made it clear to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1982 that he thought that personation was a problem and that he would like to reach agreement with the parties participating in the Assembly on how to deal with it.

The purpose of the Bill is to ensure that personation, which could distort election results in Northern Ireland, is abolished or at least minimised. We should thank Northern Ireland Ministers for recognising that there is a problem and that all the constitutional parties in the Province want to deal with it.

When I first read the Bill, I thought that hardly any hon. Member could oppose it. I have listened to a number of speeches and I understand the opposition of some Northern Ireland Members, but, in fairness to the Secretary of State and his colleagues, we ought to accept that the Government are entitled to the benefit of the doubt. We do not have identity cards at present, the Bill will apply only to Northern Ireland and the Government are trying to make voting not much more difficult than it already is in Northern Ireland — I know that many people have difficulties in voting.

Mr. McCusker: The hon. Gentleman talks about the benefit of the doubt, but does he not believe that the benefit of the doubt should be given to the person who probably has the right to vote, rather than to the Government, who may be preventing that person from voting?

Mr. Brown: I concede that point. There is a problem of personation and, in trying to deal with it, we will inevitably place a burden on the overwhelming majority of citizens in the Province who want to exercise their democratic rights. I do not know how we can solve that problem unless we deal with it on a nationwide basis. My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) was right to point out that, although there is not much personation in the rest of the United Kingdom, many hon. Members will know constituents who have been unable to cast their votes and, certainly in England, are not aware of the tendered vote process.

The Bill presents difficulties and perhaps the Government should conclude from the debate that even after the Bill has become law the Home Office should consider the problem in a United Kingdom context.

I join those who have suggested that the idea of identity cards is no longer taboo. Circumstances have changed since the war. All hon. Members have an identity card which carries their photograph and signature and could include their address. The introduction of such cards would be an ideal system if the Government considered the problem on a United Kingdom basis.

However, an immediate problem faces the Northern Ireland electorate. It is because the problem of personation has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years that Northern Ireland Ministers have recognised that there is an immediate need to deal with it. They have not shown undue haste, but they are bringing the Bill forward quickly because they wish to ensure that the disgraceful practice of personation is controlled by the time of the next elections in Northern Ireland.

I agree with the hon. Members who have mentioned the difficulties presented by the prescribed documents. However, when we attack the inadequacies of those documents, we have to answer the question that is bound to be posed by the Secretary of State, which is, "What other documents could be used?"

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) suggested that there could be a greater role for the poll card. Every elector on the register is sent such a card. It says on it that it is not a requirement that the person should take it to the polling station. I recognise that this may be a matter for the Home Office rather than the Northern Ireland Office, but those prescribed documents might be more acceptable if there was a requirement to take the polling card along to the polling station. Indeed, everyone in the United Kingdom is sent a card.

Mr. McCusker: I say it in the nicest possible way, but the hon. Gentleman is demonstrating his ignorance of the situation in Northern Ireland. Polling cards are easily available in the Province. Indeed, one of the incidents that, I believe, brought the whole issue to the Government's attention involved the RUC stopping a minibus in Fermanagh and South Tyrone during one of the recent elections. It contained people from the Irish Republic—some of them from as far away as County Cork—who had fistfulls of polling cards for people in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone electoral area. They were clearly on their way to personate those voters.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. It was an idea that was put forward from the perspective of an English Member of Parliament, and in England that is not a problem.

However, there is another problem which, sadly, the Bill does not deal with — voter registration and the inaccuracy of the electoral register. In the United Kingdom any elector has the right to be registered in more than one place. I am registered as an elector in the London borough in which I live when I am attending to my parliamentary duties, but I am also registered as a voter in my own constituency. It is illegal for me to vote anywhere other than in my constituency or in the constituency in which I live in London. I am convinced that in Northern Ireland many people may be registered in more than one constituency and probably cast votes in more than one constituency.

[Mr. Brown]

I wonder whether there is any purpose in giving people in the United Kingdom the right to be on more than one electoral register. I say that with reference at least to parliamentary elections, although it would be difficult perhaps to differentiate on the electoral register between local government and parliamentary elections. The Home Office should consider that point, because that may be one of the problems in Northern Ireland. However, perhaps it should be considered in the wider context of electoral reform and the Bill that will be introduced later this Session.

The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) gave us a critical analysis of the prescribed documents. He drew attention to clause 1(2)(1B) which provides:

"Where a voter produces a prescribed document, the presiding officer or clerk to whom it is produced shall deliver a ballot paper to the voter unless the officer or clerk decides that the document raises a reasonable doubt".

But one of the main problems about these documents, which was raised first by the right hon. Gentleman and later by other hon. Members, is that, for example, a voter may use his medical card which contains his name but which bears an address that does not correspond to that on the electoral register. In all honesty the voter can take his medical card along as a prescribed document. But he may have moved several times since the medical card was issued, and if the lack of correspondence between his addresses is seen as something that gives rise to a "reasonable doubt", he may be deprived of his vote. However, the date of birth will also appear on the medical card and that might help in some small way to allay some of the fears expressed by the right hon. Member for South Down.

As I said in my intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) it is illegal not to notify the appropiate authorities if the address on a driving licence—whether it be a United Kingdom or Northern Ireland licence—is inaccurate. However, that does not detract from the arguments that have been put about the difficulties involved in these prescribed documents.

I shall vote for the Bill because its intentions are entirely honourable. We should pay tribute to the Government for recognising the problem and introducing legislation. However, I hope that the Northern Ireland Office will take careful note of the voices that have been raised against the Bill, because they are based on the experiences of those who have to stand as candidates using the electoral system in Northern Ireland. They have already foreseen, in a way that I have not, some of the dificulties that will arise. Therefore, I hope that the Northern Ireland Office will give due credit to some of the arguments that have been raised against the Bill. If, after one or two local government or parliamentary elections, it appears that the prescribed documents do not satisfy the intentions of the Northern Ireland Office or of hon. Members, we may have to consider a much wider reform in the context of the whole of the United Kingdom, with the Home Office introducing proposals that involve the possibility of the citizens of the United Kingdom holding identity cards.

8.20 pm

Mr. A. Cecil Walker (Belfast, North): As several hon. Members have said, personation as we know it has always been a fact of life in Northern Ireland, where a few ardent supporters of a particular candidate might try to obtain an advantage by voting more than once. However, the practice was never considered widespread and the number of votes obtained by that process was minimal in proportion to the number of votes cast. That was the situation until the paramilitary groups decided that the political arena would be a desirable platform from which they could don a cloak of respectability and at the same time use the process in an effort to enlist sympathy for their cause.

Everyone in Northern Ireland knows that such groups do not have the electoral support that the results of previous elections would suggest. One has only to witness the blatant vote-stealing that goes on at polling stations in various electoral areas to know that such behaviour can produce a result that is completely contrary to the electorate's wishes. As has been said, the right to vote is the cornerstone of democracy, and I am pleased that the Government have now recognised that that right must be protected.

I support the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) and the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) when they say that electoral abuse is not peculiar to Northern Ireland and that the various safeguards outlined in the Bill could have a much wider application. I understand that there have been many reported instances of electoral irregularities throughout the United Kingdom, and now that the nettle has been grasped, I should have thought that such legislation could be applied throughout the United Kingdom.

During elections, I have personally witnessed carloads of vote-stealers invading polling stations in areas where conditions were tailor-made for electoral abuse. Those areas contained large concentrations of derelict and blocked-up houses because the population had moved because of redevelopment plans. Voting regulations enabled the votes of the previous occupants to be stolen. Groups of dedicated paramilitaries had reconnoitred the area, identified the vacant properties, compared them with the electoral register and, having confirmed that votes were applicable to the properties, conducted a well-organised vote-stealing campaign. Groups of personators descended on the polling stations and, using disguises and candidates' election addresses as a form of documentation, demanded voting papers. Some succeeded.

The constables on duty at polling stations are well aware of what goes on. On the some occasions they try to halt the personators, but lack of evidence and lack of authority make that difficult.

Polling agents sometimes challenge individuals but they are often verbally abused. In some areas presiding officers are not over-anxious to take appropriate action. If the offender leaves the station without casting a vote, that is the end of the matter.

The Bill recognises the situation. Clause 3 lays down grounds which will allow the police to act in a more determined manner to apprehend personators. I welcome that. I am pleased that the Bill also contains provision for the searching of vehicles when it is suspected that they are being used for personation purposes.

Care must be exercised over the impartiality of presiding officers and their clerks because of the responsibilities thrust upon them. Reports have been made about intimidation. That accounts for their unwillingness to challenge personators.

The strengthening of police powers will instil confidence in the polling stations, but pressures can be applied in Northern Ireland on a person's everyday life by those whose declared aim is to disrupt or destroy our democratic system.

There is an inherent risk that the requirement to produce proof of identity will alienate some voters. We cannot rule out the possibility that some people may never again exercise their right to vote and will be lost to the democratic process. I hope and trust that voters will realise that the measures proposed are designed to protect their votes and their electoral rights. If the electoral process is discredited people will be dissuaded from voting. I am sure that voters will believe that we are trying to provide a sound electoral process, free from manipulation.

The prescribed documents have been chosen because they are available to all electors. The word "available" worries me. The ready availability of some of the documents will encourage unscrupulous paramilitary vote-stealers to borrow such documents so that they may vote for a particular candidate. Supplementary benefit and pension books are particularly easy to obtain by third parties. Elderly or infirm people in particular often ask others to collect their benefit. The documentary evidence could be used for purposes which were never intended.

Medical cards are also a problem because they are readily available. An elderly person could be persuaded to give up the card in the belief that the candidate of their choice would receive their vote without the need to make their way to the polling station. That will apply particularly if the polling station is inaccessible.

More attention should be given to the siting of polling stations. In my area, the electoral officer seems deliberately to put polling stations in the highest positions. That makes it almost impossible for senior citizens to attend. At the last election, it was pathetic to see the elderly, many of them on crutches or walking aids, struggling to negotiate inclines which would exhaust the able-bodied. By the use of such stations, many pensioners and infirm people are denied the right to exercise their franchise. The way is left wide open for manipulators to engage in exploitation, to the detriment of the democratic process.

One method of ensuring that democracy operates is that which is accepted in many countries, most recently in Nicaragua. After voting, the voter is required to have his thumb stamped with a dye which disappears after two or three days. It is a painless and simple operation which would be accepted by an electorate which was aware of what is happening and which is as anxious as we are to uphold the right to vote.

I have talked to my constituents and not one has voiced an objection to that suggestion. They say that in view of the abuses of the system, they appreciate that extra conditions may be required of them before they exercise their right to vote. They prefer that system to producing identification documents.

In an eloquent speech, the hon. Member for Epping Forest mentioned ID cards. The issue of identity cards would be a major change and raise fundamental questions of principle, particularly in Northern Ireland, but ID cards would deal effectively with personation and be of immense value on security and social fronts. Many of us will remember the identity cards carried during the last war. They were essential for the safety of the nation. Northern Ireland is at war. Law-abiding people will certainly not object to carrying ID cards. Citizens of many other countries carry such cards in their social security documentation.

Other matters must be considered, such as including a resident's date of birth on the annual registration form. That would assist in the identification of personators. Electors should be required to state their date of birth, but that information need not appear publicly on the electoral roll. It need be included only on the central register and on copies used by clerks at polling stations. We need to examine the Bill in detail.

In general, the electorate of Northern Ireland will appreciate the need for such a Bill and the reassurance of confidence in democratic institutions.

8.39 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): I support right hon. and hon. Members in their expressions of fear about the inadequacies of the Bill. However, we must express our appreciation to the Secretary of State for so clearly setting his mind to such an important matter. The legislation's intention is honourable. We must express our thanks to the Government for recognising such a serious problem in the Province.

I represent a constituency where a few votes can affect the outcome of an election. I have a majority of 78, and I know how many votes were personated by the Sinn Fein. Therefore, there is some urgency to the matter. I must warn the Secretary of State that this legislation could be rushed—although, I accept, with the best intentions—but rushed legislation and rushed law is not in the best interests of the people of the United Kingdom.

The problem of personation—or vote stealing, to give it its honest title—has a long tradition not only in Northern Ireland but throughout Ireland. The old maxim of "Vote early and vote often" was heard in our childhood during election campaigns. Physical resurrections are common on election day. I have great reverence for the best book of all, the Holy Bible, which speaks about a day of resurrection. I assure the House that that was never intended to be election day.

Such old phrases as "Lend me your coat to vote" are funny, but there is a serious aspect. Many of those in Republican circles sit around the pub table proclaiming their heroism because of stealing a vote, thereby not permitting someone to vote. During the last election, a priest aged over 50 in part of my constituency could not get to the polling booth. However, a 17-year old, claiming that he was the priest, voted for Sinn Fein. I know of a hard-working Protestant family from outside Omagh—a father, mother and four sons—who returned from a hard day's work and went to vote, but found that Sinn Fein had taken their votes. Six of my constituents were robbed of their right to choose a Member of Parliament.

Regardless of the lighthearted manner with which the subject is often treated, it is a serious problem. It takes on a more sinister aspect during each election. Vote stealing is as well organised by Sinn Fein as are other crimes committed by fellow gangsters in the IRA. Violence at polling booths, and intimidation of polling clerks, party workers and presiding officers are prevalent. In West Belfast on one occasion Sinn Fein thugs literally took over the polling station. Party workers can find themselves in a dangerous position. To challenge personators is to risk their lives. I pay tribute to my party workers during the

[Rev. William McCrea]

recent general election. They challenged members of the Sinn Fein, who recently appeared in court and were fined for personation.

The problem must be dealt with effectively. The Secretary of State has estimated that as much as 20 per cent. of the Sinn Fein vote is stolen. A party that has no reservations about supporting, and even participating in, murder would have no compunction about engaging in wholesale theft of votes. All political parties in Northern Ireland have been calling for action to stop that and to prevent the open flouting of the law by Sinn Fein and its supporters.

Right hon. and hon. Members support the call for action and have endorsed wholeheartedly the principle underlying the legislation. However, we must address our minds to the question whether the legislation will work and whether it is the legislation that we need. I agree with the increase in fines and prison sentences. I trust that the court will impose maximum sentences as a deterrent to those considering stealing a vote. Often derisory sentences have been handed out. Those who take part in such organised theft know that they have little to fear.

My main reservation about the measure is that the documents suggested for identification are insufficient to prevent vote stealing. Many of them have no photographs and a number, such as medical cards, can be easily copied. I have always supported the introduction of identification cards, which would include a photograph and several other details. They could be punched or marked when a vote had been cast. There could be different marks for different elections. That system operates in some universities where student union cards must be produced and marked before the ballot paper is handed over.

I listened with interest to the suggestion of the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker) about dye on the thumb. Knowing the IRA, it would not be past its ingenuity to obtain a product to remove the dye. Indeed, there may be a great increase in the number of thumb suckers during an election.

Other hon. Members on both sides of the House have dealt adequately with the failure of the legislation to deal with this most important matter. However, I recognise and commend the work of the Secretary of State in considering this serious problem. Sinn Fein is the real concern of constitutional politicians and parties. It has no respect for either the ballot box or democracy. It is my honest, considered opinion that to permit Sinn Fein to stand in and use the democratic process makes a mockery of the ballot box. It should not be allowed to exploit both the Armalite and the ballot box.

Constitutional parties know that it is hard enough to get people to vote on election day. It is not the intention of the House to stop those who genuinely want to vote and choose their representatives. I trust that there will not be any undue hindrance put in the way of those who have a right and a desire to vote.

While constitutional parties find it difficult to persuade people to vote, Sinn Fein is ready to use the ballot box and to claim a great number of votes that it has stolen on election day. I trust that the Government will grasp the nettle and proscribe Sinn Fein. That will stop it using the ballot box with one hand while holding the Armalite with the other. I trust that the Secretary of State or the Minister of State will give us some hope in that direction. The people of Ulster are crying out that the body called Sinn Fein should no longer have the right to stand for elections until it renounces the Armalite and violence and turns its back upon them.

8.50 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): I should have liked wholeheartedly to welcome the Secretary of State to his new post. I should have done so if he had introduced a better Bill as his first piece of proposed legislation. I hope that a change will be made in the near future and that I shall soon have an opportunity to welcome him wholeheartedly to his new post as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The majority of reasonable and decent people in both sections of the community in Northern Ireland are honest and upright citizens. They are suffering from what I describe as election fatigue. In many areas fewer voters are turning out to exercise their democratic right. As they withdraw from participation in election processes, so the door opens wider to admit those who use and abuse the democratic process to promote selected candidates who are sponsored by organisations which have contempt for the high ideals of freedom, justice and democracy. There is a need to rationalise the system, especially one which in Northern Ireland requires elections to be held to choose representatives for district councils, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the House of Commons and the European Parliament. All these representatives are chosen in separate elections. We are fortunate in Northern Ireland to have one year in five that is free from elections.

The opportunists who personate in a militaristic manner have many opportunities to practise and perfect their skills in vote-stealing. The principle that each elector is entitled to exercise his or her vote, or right to vote, in an election is a right and just principle. It is our responsibility to ensure that what is right in principle can be practised, and that the conditions necessary to protect the principle are perfected here in Westminster in legislation. I think that we are all agreed that the abuse of personation must be stopped in Northern Ireland and throughout the United Kingdom. On this occasion we are merely asking the Government to give us a realistic method of identifying an elector who wishes to exercise this franchise and to protect that voter from personation by another.

There is always some truth in wisecracks and legpulls. The slogan "Vote early and vote often" is in itself an incitement to personation. We cannot get away from the fact that using the votes of the dead, those who are absent on holiday or those who for other reasons are unable to exercise their own vote is no different from stealing the vote of someone who supports an opposing party. Both acts are equally dishonest and deplorable.

Considerable moves have been made in Northern Ireland. There used to be a hue and cry daily about discrimination. There have been many boundary commission reports implemented in recent years. Changes have been accepted and there is now no gerrymandering of ward or constituency boundaries to advantage the Unionist majority. Indeed, there appears to be positive action or discrimination to weaken the influence of the majority in Ulster. That is one reason why many in Northern Ireland do not exercise their right to vote and thereby afford opportunities for personation. There is resentment that Ulster is the only part of the United Kingdom which is forced to use proportional representation for council, Assembly and European elections. The

majority in Northern Ireland believes passionately that only those practices that are good enough for the mainland should be used in Northern Ireland. Proportional representation is obviously not good enough or acceptable for the mainland and the system should be scrapped in Northern Ireland, even though that would not contribute much to reducing personation.

If the Government believe that by introducing the Bill in its present form they will prevent the widespread personation that is practised in Northern Ireland, experience will prove the Ulster Unionists right, as has happened time after time. We get no satisfaction in the House in saying, "We told you so.". This is a matter of which Members representing mainland constituencies have little experience as yet, and I emphasise "yet". That was true also of attacks on policemen by the criminals among picketing miners. The mainland has not had much experience either of petrol bombs being thrown at policemen by mobsters, despite the fact that that force, including the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Northern Ireland, is admired throughout the world by law-abiding citizens. It is not worth while tinkering with legislation to prevent personation. The Government must be ruthless in their determination to prevent the abuses that have recently occurred. Vote-stealing is only another card in the pack of those who supplement their funds through bank and payroll robberies and raids on post offices to promote revolutionary change and to destroy democratic systems and institutions.

Proper identification with a photograph or the signature of the holder attached to the card could prevent, or at the very least substantially reduce, personation. It could help to reduce the fraudulent collection of benefits, pensions, and so on when documents are stolen. Probably more than ever, in 1984 people are accustomed to having cards, passes and some type of identification with them. Such election cards — I do not want to refer to them as identity cards — could last for up to 10 years. The holders who present authentic identification would be assured of the right to exercise their vote.

Even in my constituency — one to which reference has been made — where there is a low turnout, there is some evidence of personation. It is true to say that what has occurred in parts of my constituency where there was a head-on assault by another ally of Sinn Fein — people masqueraded as Irish Independents — has happened elsewhere. I know of one case where a son was alleged to be a strong supporter of an extremist group. He voted before his father came home from work, thereby disfranchising his father. Such abuse can create many kinds of problems, not only between parties but within families.

Prescribed documents that have no attached photographs are useless and should be avoided. The greatest alleged offenders and exploiters of personation are members of Sinn Fein, and we should not be under any illusion about the fact that restricting organised personation will have any impact on Sinn Fein's campaign. Sinn Fein seeks no mandate through the ballot box for its murderous campaign. Danny Morrison has already said that Sinn Fein will take power in Ireland, in the north now and in the south later. Perhaps that will happen sooner rather than later in the Irish Republic where economic and social conditions provide a nursery for revolution. I trust that the Government will think again about this Bill and accept our suggestions.

9.2 pm

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): During a debate only a few weeks ago, I suggested that too much had been made of what we mistakenly regard as the electoral advances of Sinn Fein. I said that I could never fully understand the near-hysteria — "hysteria" is the only word that I could use — that swept Whitehall and Fleet street in the immediate aftermath of the Assembly elections in 1982. That hysteria occurred for the simple reason that Sinn Fein had achieved 64,000 votes. My puzzlement arose because, in 1921, in an election for the first Northern Ireland Parliament — the election was held in the same area and under exactly the same conditions, with proportional representation and all the rest of it — Sinn Fein received 104,000 votes. During the 60 years in between, Sinn Fein's support peaked and dipped. On occasions, Sinn Fein representatives have won seats in this House. So what? They do not attend; they do not take those seats.

At the general election in 1983 Gerry Adams won the seat for Belfast, West, and again, I say, so what? He does not attend. The interests of the people of Belfast, West are looked after in the House by Ulster Members occupying other seats and by hon. Members representing seats in Great Britain, because we all take part in the great national debates. Only one elected Member out of 650 neglects and fails to do his duty. To a great extent, individual constituency cases in Belfast, West are dealt with by those of us who represent constituencies on the borders of that constituency.

Sinn Fein election victories are nothing new. Its absenteeism from the place to which it was elected is nothing new and nor is there anything new in it neglecting its parliamentary duties.

If the purpose of the Bill is to contain and curb the growth of electoral support for Sinn Fein — even bogus support and bogus growth — an alternative is to demonstrate that Sinn Fein duplicity will not work. It cannot and will not be accorded facilities that enable it to claim that results can be achieved by a combination of political and terrorist methods.

A commendable pattern has been firmly established by the Minister of State who refused to meet Sinn Fein members of a deputation only two weeks ago. I do not say that he is alone in that. I hope that his behaviour on that occasion is typical of what we can expect from the Secretary of State and all his colleagues. If Ministers, Departments and statutory bodies — it is important to include that leg of the stool — were always to remember that Sinn Fein representatives regard the Armalite as more powerful than the ballot box, and that the ballot box is regarded by them as an endorsement of their campaign of murder, matters would be put in their proper perspective. Sinn Fein has deliberately chosen the alternative of violence and force. It should not be given the added bonus of being able to pretend that it is genuinely elected.

Sinn Fein's strength, such as it is, results from its being able to play things both ways. I hope that the Minister of State and all his colleagues will put a stop to all that.

The Secretary of State was right when he listed all the electoral malpractices and abuses, and we join him in saying that the joking has to stop. We all hoped and expected that the draftsmen could have provided an effective measure. I do not necessarily suggest that it should be 100 per cent. effective, because we can never

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achieve perfection in this wicked world, but surely to goodness they could have come nearer the target than the provisions contained in the Bill.

The Secretary of State drew attention to what he regarded as the significant abuse of the Assembly elections in 1982. He probably chose the worst example of the mythical increase in Sinn Fein votes because in that election, which set Whitehall and Fleet street agog, Sinn Fein achieved only 64,000 votes. The Secretary of State seemed to be saying—he will correct me if I heard him wrongly—that safeguards were greatly tightened so that by the time we reached the 1983 general election, vote-stealing and personation were much less a feature of that election result.

If we study the figures on that occasion we shall see that, despite the increased safeguards, the Sinn Fein vote increased from 64,000 to 102,000. To confirm what I said about the peaks and dips of Sinn Fein's electoral fortunes, it slumped back, in what must have been for it an alarming fashion, in the EC election this year.

Mr. Scott: I know that we are all anxious to get on, but I should tell the right hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made exactly the opposite point. It was that at the general election in 1983, in our judgment, Sinn Fein made the most sustained and determined effort at personation.

Mr. Molyneaux: I can accept that. It is correct that Sinn Fein made that effort, but that does not destroy the validity of the point that I was making. The alarm and the panic seemed to set in for no reason that I can understand. I am sure that Ministers were in the same puzzled state about why there should have been all the alarm and despondency about Sinn Fein getting a mere 64,000 votes at the Assembly election.

The Secretary of State mentioned holiday votes and the possibility, which I hope has now receded, of Northern Ireland being deprived of holiday votes when the Home Secretary's Bill is considered later this Session. If the Home Secretary were to be unwise enough to carry out that threat and to refuse to grant holiday votes to Northern Ireland, he would issue an open invitation to vote-stealers. If they were certain that John Simpson, his wife and two of his family were in Majorca for two weeks, they could go to the polling station, no doubt equipped with a convincing medical card, driving licence and so on—presumably the passport would be abroad on that occasion—and get away with it. I hope that that certainty will be removed by allowing holiday-makers to vote for themselves.

Mr. Hume: Does not the right hon. Gentleman agree that if a postal vote were given to holiday-makers from Northern Ireland, the door would be wide open to total corruption of the electoral system? Once one gives holiday-makers a postal vote, every single voter has the right to a postal vote. There would be no control over voting if one granted that to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Molyneaux: When we consider the Home Secretary's Bill, I hope that the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) will be here and will have an opportunity to speak to illustrate that. If one considers the six most marginal constituencies in Great Britain, one sees that they have a high proportion of postal votes, simply because so much depends upon the postal vote facility. What is in fact proposed in the Select Committee's report on the Representation of the People Act is the granting of an alternative method of voting. I hope that hon. Members on this side of the water will set their faces against it.

The Secretary of State said that some form of identification was needed. We agree about that, but we differ on its effectiveness. Perhaps in the coming weeks we can put our heads together and devise a foolproof method.

We must take effective action to safeguard the democratic system, as the Secretary of State said, and I agree with him. We agree that every effort must be made to find an effective system. The debate has shown that there is widespread agreement that in the Bill as currently drafted we have not come near to finding it. It was that difficulty in finding any form of effective system of identification that caused the delay, to which the Secretary of State legitimately referred, in bringing forward legislation in the reign of another Secretary of State. Unfortunately the present Secretary of State has been landed with this baby. The difficulty in providing an effective form of identification rather than an unwillingness to stamp out vote-stealing was the problem all along. That is even recognised by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights.

The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) wondered whether the 1983 general election results might have been different if there had been no vote-stealing. I think that it will be generally recognised by those who have studied the statistics that even if personation and vote-stealing had not been on the scale on which they were generally supposed to have been, and the Bill had been in force, it would have made no difference to the outcome in the 17 seats.

Mr. Archer: I am grateful for the opportunity to elucidate what I said if it was not clear. I specifically said that I was not suggesting that the result would have been different in the last election, but the margins were so narrow that one could imagine it being different in some future election as a result of vote-stealing.

Mr. Molyneaux: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for that clarification.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman also seemed to chide me for my comments in the debate on the Gracious Speech when I said that we were prepared to accept that safeguards might be necessary but that it should be recognised that that also applied to various other areas of the United Kingdom. I was referring to complaints made in the House in July by Members representing certain areas of England and Wales. I pointed out that there had been fairly recent instances of personation on a significant scale in the island of Great Britain and that the franchise had been abused there as well as in Northern Ireland in recent elections. Proof of that was furnished by Members representing those areas.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): In Leicester there was definite evidence of personation and I believe that the same was true in other cities. In areas of multi-occupied housing, or with a large ethnic community, there is a temptation and under the present system there is no definite means of disproving the entitlement to vote of a

person who appears at the polling station with the relevant polling card. There is no way of proving that he is not who he says he is.

Mr. Molyneaux: I am grateful for that confirmation of the fears expressed on that earlier occasion, which I know are shared by many Opposition Members. I hope that by the end of our protracted deliberations on the Bill we shall all be a great deal wiser and able to devise means of eradicating this plague from the whole of the United Kingdom.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) rightly said that the House should not be asked to approve the Bill without seeing the regulations. Without the regulations the Bill is meaningless, so it is vital that we should have sight of them in definitive form before the end of the Committee stage, let alone the remaining stages of the Bill. The documents listed in unofficial form are all documents that the citizens is not legally required to hold. If their holding is a condition of the right to vote, what is the objection to stipulating that an effective identity card must be held and produced?

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Down pointed out that party representatives and agents were prevented from examining the documents of proof and thus from giving any view on the validity of the claim that the person presenting them was indeed the person named on the register. Whatever the drafting, and whatever the intention may have been, the role of party agents is bound to be reduced. My hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) made that quite clear. Representatives of candidates have a vital role to play in the democratic process at general elections and indeed other elections.

Enough has already been said in the debate to illustrate the ineffectiveness of all the documents so far listed. Right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House clearly fear that the Bill in its present form may make the situation worse rather than better. If by any mischance our amendment is defeated and the Bill is committed to a Committee of the whole House and if the Committee begins next Tuesday, we shall bear in mind the Secretary of State's undertaking to consider what has been said in the debate so that changes can be made, presumably in the list and the regulations, before the Bill completes its passage through Parliament. However, the Secretary of State cannot be expected to come to any conclusion in the 120 hours that remain before the commencement of Committee stage on Tuesday. The Government have now set their hand to this measure, the object of which we all support in principle. Perhaps they might consider beginning the Committee stage next Tuesday—if they feel that they must do so—but, with the agreement of the business managers, allowing a reasonable period to elapse before the House is invited to complete the remaining stages of what is generally admitted to be an ill-thought-out Bill.

9.20 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I apologise for my absence from the House earlier this evening. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) explained, I was in Belfast. The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) made some kind references to my visit. After my recent appointment as a Front Bench spokesman on Northern Ireland affairs, I wanted to make an early acquaintance with Northern Ireland. I was able to see a great deal in a short time, to speak a little and to listen a great deal. Those who live in Northern Ireland will find that I shall visit the Province frequently and that I shall be sympathetic to their problems.

I have listened to the debate with some care, and it seems to me that the elected representatives of Northern Ireland are apprehensive about losing the baby with the bathwater. There is concern about personation and about illicit practices connected with the ballot box, but hon. Members are not entirely sure that the Government have found the right way to proceed. They want to protect the democratic system but at the same time to be sure that there is no prejudice to that system.

The Government have an obligation to ensure that electoral results in Northern Ireland are not distorted by personation. The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) pointed out that he owes his seat here to a majority of 78. There are in Northern Ireland four constituencies where the majority is less than 3,000. We are dealing with an important point of political principle, but any change can and will have serious effects. We are dealing with a fundamental right to vote, and that fundamental right must be inviolate.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) told us that he did not believe that 20,000 cases of personation took place. The Secretary of State prefaced his remarks with the words "some observers believe". He was right to do so. I spoke to an electoral officer in Belfast, and he told me that he believed that personation could not in any practical sense surpass 1 per cent. of the vote. The Secretary of State referred to the fact that tendered ballots returned amounted to 762 and 949 votes respectively in the last two elections. As he said, those figures might represent the sum total of those who felt sufficiently exercised to register a tendered ballot paper by way of protest. Whether the figure is one in five, or 1 per cent., I do not know. However, in his report of 1982-83, the chief electoral officer of Northern Ireland declared:

> "It is most difficult to ascertain the actual level of personation that takes place. What is clear however is that there is a perception of a high level abuse and accordingly the present legislation appears to be inadequate to meet the needs of the situation."

He added that there should be consideration of changes in the arrangements for postal votes. The Government take that point, and I understand that they are making provision for a tightening-up of procedure with relation to postal votes, through the Representation of the People Acts. The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) was anxious about his constituency. He seemed to base that anxiety on the concept of definite evidence about multiple-occupation dwellings. I draw his attention to the remarks of the chief electoral officer that evidence in Northern Ireland was elusive. Was the hon. Gentleman espousing the theme that was found in the speeches of the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) and the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) that there is a move to separate Northern Ireland from Great Britain, and that the personation proposals, which do not relate to the mainland, are part and parcel of the concept of a separate policy? I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will take the opportunity in Committee to expand those points.

The Opposition believe that the Government are determined not to throw out the baby with the bath water.

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

They want the checks and balances which every Government must have when dealing with legislation, and they want to ensure safeguards. The prescribed list, which will be produced during our proceedings, will be an attempt to define the documents that will be required. The tendered ballot paper was considered to be a safeguard, but it is not nearly strong enough, and there will be a challenge by way of the election petition.

The Bill appears to broaden the mechanisms of local and European elections. Those who will take part in the Committee, who have proposals for the documents that might be produced at the polling booth, will no doubt wish to take into account the fact that the Government have introduced the proposals, not to keep the whips or the business managers busy, but to get the legislation on the statute book in time for the May elections. However, having seen what the House of Lords did with the GLC election proposals, the Government might have been afraid of them. They might still have something up their sleeve with this legislation, although I understand their desire to get it on the statute book earlier rather than later.

The hon. Member for Epping Forest sought to assimilate, as he often rightly does, as it is a view that he strongly holds, the fact that elections in Northern Ireland should be the same as those on the mainland, but there will always be particularities in Northern Ireland elections which are different from our country — *[Interruption.]* That was a slip of the tongue, although not a Freudian slip. In his first election campaign in Northern Ireland the slogan of the right hon. Member for South Down was, "Keep Britain out", although he was referring to the EC.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Perhaps it would help the hon. Gentleman if I informed him that, according to the Department of Trade and Industry, Northern Ireland is part of Britain and its inhabitants are British for statutory purposes.

Mr. Bell: I would not dispute what the right hon. Gentleman says. I recall the debate in the House on 7 July, when the right hon. Gentleman said:

> "The rule has been never to allow Northern Ireland to cease to be separate from the rest of the United Kingdom." — [*Official Report*, 7 July 1983; Vol. 45, c. 459.]

I have followed the right hon. Gentleman's views with great care, and I note that he produced the most non-sectarian vote of the election, which no doubt he will remember. In that election, only 7 per cent. of Conservative candidates mentioned Northern Ireland in their election address. If it is any consolation to Conservative Members, only 5 per cent. of Labour candidates referred to it in their address, and only 2 per cent. of Liberal candidates referred to Northern Ireland in their address.

The Westminster elections are the only ones in Northern Ireland with the single-Member seat relative to the majority system. In all the others, the single transferable vote form of proportional representation is used. Therefore, in Northern Ireland, elections have a seperate agenda. Election campaigns have their own content, their own issues, and personalities which, in the words of two political commentators, Mr. Butler and Mr. Cavanagh, were a world apart from Smith square and Walworth road. As the Secretary of State said, our elections in this country—I repeat the word because we are talking about a country, as Northern Ireland is a country——

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Highlands and Islands of Scotland are worlds apart from Smith square?

Mr. Bell: I have not been that far, but in relation to the Northern Ireland election I am not sure that they have a particular role to play.

The Secretary of State said that there is not in our country—I repeat the words that I used at the beginning — paramilitary interference. We must take that into account when we consider Northern Ireland and its election problem. The Secretary of State also said that he would listen to the comments and proposals that may be made when the Bill goes into Committee. I can testify that the Secretary of State is a good listener, having spent 59 Committee sittings with him, on the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill.

The Opposition believe that the appropriate course is to support Second Reading and to make representations in Committee. The objections that have to be put, and the proposals on documents that may be raised, will best be made in Committee. We also welcome the increase in the public expenditure. The Opposition always look forward to Government pronouncements of more public expenditure, and £50,000 is being made available for additional polling equipment and staff.

On balance, the Opposition believe that it is right to bring in legislation on personation. It is right for the Government to seek to balance the obvious desire not to interfere with the right to vote with an attempt to limit the insidious disease of personation, which can influence and prejudice the results of the ballot box.

9.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I welcome the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) to his new responsibility for Northern Ireland. I am delighted to hear him, and I look forward to keeping in close touch with him over the work that inevitably lies ahead for those concerned with these matters. I am also delighted that he was in Belfast last night. He will come to know that, in the winter months, one cannot always guarantee that one will be able to return on time. I congratulate him on his speech tonight.

We have had an important debate about an important Bill. Franchise and the voting system are central to the basis of our democratic system. Two responsibilities rest on our shoulders in looking after that system. The first is to see that the franchise can be freely exercised by all those who are entitled to it. The second is to protect the fairness of the system, both because it is essential that it should be seen to be fair, because its reputation is part of the base upon which it is founded, and because to deprive an elector of his vote is a blow to the concept of democracy. The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) described the practice of vote stealing as a poison within our democracy which, if allowed to flow unchecked, would have the same effect as a poison.

The justification for the Bill rests on the Government's judgment about the extent of the personation which has occurred in recent elections in Northern Ireland and on the

representations made to us by all the constitutional parties in the Province. I shall be dealing with both these matters, but before I do perhaps I can deal immediately with the problem of the documents which are listed.

As was to be expected, the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) went straight to the heart of the matter when he raised various aspects of this part of the Government's proposals. Although the list of documents is not a part of the Bill and we intend to publish it in due course in an order, nevertheless the Government felt it right to include the list in the notes on clauses so that the House might discuss them in today's debate and so that the Government might take account of the various matters raised by right hon. and hon. Members.

I have to be frank with the House. I cannot say that I am 100 per cent. certain that at the moment we have it right. After all, we are moving into totally uncharted waters. The best judgment that we can make is that the list is about right, but I cannot say that after we have had some experience it will not be necessary to amend or modify the list.

The Government were urged to have the list ready by Tuesday when we came to the remaining stages of the Bill. Subject, of course, to our wish to listen to the discussions in another place when the Bill goes there, it is sensible for the Government, having heard the arguments in today's debate, to be able to give the Committee a considered view of our position before embarking on the remaining stages. As I have said, the House already has the proposed list.

We had to draw a balance. We did not want the list of documents drawn so tightly that there was a danger of disfranchising electors. But we did not want it drawn so widely and loosely that it would simply be a cover for the continuation of the activities of those who wished to undermine the electoral system. That was a difficult judgment, but I think that we have it about right.

If we are determined to get this legislation in operation in time to tackle the problem by the next local government elections in May 1985, the approach outlined in the Bill is about the best that we can do. But obviously we shall review the experience of that election and see whether any amendment needs to be made to the list.

A number of hon. Members made great play of the impact of clause 1 on the document produced and the judgment which had to be exercised by the presiding officer in cases of doubt. The clause refers to doubt about whether the voter is the person whom he represents himself to be. It does not, as some hon. Members seemed to believe, require the presiding officer to follow blindly the evidence of the document produced. He can look at the name on the document, where appropriate, at the photograph on the document and, where appropriate, at the date of birth on the document. He is not required to take notice of the address on the document. He is also required to use his own common sense in deciding whether he has a reasonable doubt that the person is the person he represents himself to be when asking for his ballot paper.

If right hon. and hon. Members feel that we have not got the wording of the clause right to achieve that end, we can turn our minds to it in Committee. I am advised that the wording has the effect not of asking the presiding officer blindly to follow the evidence of the document but of enabling him to apply his common sense and judgment in coming to a conclusion whether in practice there is a reasonable doubt.

The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) made various suggestions for improving the system of electoral registration and tightening it up in such a way as to make personation much more difficult. It might be possible to arrive at something that was virtually foolproof. We, and in particular the chief electoral officer, continually strive to find ways of tightening up the accuracy of the register in Northern Ireland. The Government's mind is certainly not closed to the suggestions that have been made during the debate. However, those are not steps that could practically be taken in advance of the local government elections in May next year.

Some hon. Members made particular play of the medical cards, one of the documents that the Government have suggested. I freely acknowledge the limitations of that document. However, the situation will improve because over a period the old-style medical cards are being replaced by a new computer-produced document. That will be much more difficult to forge and better suited to proving the identity of an elector. The medical card is available free and universally to Northern Ireland electors. Obviously, as has been pointed out, there would be considerable advantages in restricting the documents on the list to those with a photograph, the driving licence and the passport, but they would certainly have disfranchised substantial numbers of electors in Northern Ireland, particularly in the poorer sections of the community. Therefore, while accepting that the use of the medical card for that purpose had limitations, we thought it right to include it in the list.

Hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) mentioned the problem of the marriage certificate. After the original approach of my right hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior) to the parties concerned in Northern Ireland, the Government made an early decision that it would be right to restrict the documents to official documents issued by a Government Department. Starting from that premise, one can see that it would not be right for us to include those marriage certificates which are issued by ministers of religion who carry out marriages in Northern Ireland.

However, in a sense, I take the hon. Gentleman's point. We recognised his point in coming to our conclusion about the marriage certificate. The House should bear in mind the fact that the gap between the qualifying dates upon which a register is compiled and the time when the register comes into effect is some five months. If the lady concerned had been married early in that period, it would be perfectly possible for her to have obtained a certificate by the time that the new election register came into effect. There would be a sustained advertising campaign to inform such people of the need to have one of the documents available when they go to the polling station.

On the other hand, if the lady had got married only a short while before the time when the register came into effect, she would certainly have in her possession one or more documents in her maiden name. The advertising campaign would have alerted her to the need to hang onto those until she got a marriage certificate in her new name. In practice, there is not likely to be a problem. We bore in mind the points made by the hon. Member for Antrim, North when coming to our conclusions.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the certificates are Government documents and are issued to the minister of religion by the registrar general? They are exactly the same as the certificates that he issues.

Mr. Scott: But they are not completed by the Government and formally issued by them. The documents are issued by the minister of religion and, therefore, they are outside the ground rules that we set for ourselves in deciding what documents to use.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Can the hon. Gentleman help by explaining the purpose of the reference to the fifth document? If the lady's name on the register is her maiden name, no query will arise about her identity. If she is asked to give her name and state whether that is a true statement, she will be entitled to identify herself as the person on the register. What service do the marriage lines perform?

Mr. Scott: If the lady has changed her name, the marriage certificate is clear proof that she has been through the marriage service, and her new name will be on that certificate. This is a Committee point. We can discuss these matters and decide what the list should be. However, it seems sensible that there should be such a provision for a woman who changes her name in the period between the qualifying date and the publication of the register.

A number of doubts have been raised about the evidence of personation. I was flabbergasted to hear the reported comments of the electoral officer in Belfast. They certainly do not accord with our experience or with that of the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland over the past three or four years. We have no doubt that from the time of the 1981 by-elections in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, which occurred at the time of Republican hunger strikes, widespread electoral malpractice has been deliberately and systematically employed at elections in Northern Ireland by those who are not prepared to leave their electoral prospects to the whim of the electorate.

The Government have received representations from all the constitutional parties, which are gravely alarmed at the undermining of the democratic process which that malpractice has involved. The Government received a number of representations from the political parties, especially after the general election in June 1983, when the most sustained and deliberate effort was made to subvert the electoral system. From a number of press reports and discussions with those involved in elections, the consensus seemed to be that about 20,000 votes were stolen in Northern Ireland at that general election. That figure was very much in line with the private estimate that the Government had made.

Mr. McCusker: But does not the hon. Gentleman accept that the systematic stealing of votes was confined to about one third of the constituencies in Northern Ireland? Indeed, the main problem was probably confined to only two or three constituencies.

Mr. Scott: That may be true, but I cannot see us applying these necessary proposals to counter personation to a smaller unit than the political entity of Northern Ireland. I see no case for extending them more widely. I accept that the problem tends to be concentrated in certain areas. One would be surprised if it were otherwise.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier, it is impossible to put an accurate figure on the level of electoral abuse or on personation—or plugging, as it is known in Northern Ireland. However, the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) said that the assessments that had been made were generally accepted figures, and that level of abuse cannot be tolerated. Reasonable steps, such as those that the Government are putting to the House, must be taken before the next Province-wide elections to reduce the opportunity for vote-stealing.

The Government have been accused of hastily preparing and rushing through the Bill. That cannot be sustained. It was on St. George's day 1982 that my right hon. Friend the Member for Waveney wrote to the parties in Northern Ireland expressing our concern about the extent of electoral malpractice which we were told was going on, and giving an idea of what the Government had in mind. Since then, we have had a constant dialogue with the different parties in Northern Ireland. My right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State and I informed the House of the broad lines upon which the Government were thinking. We did not expect everyone to agree with every proposal, but there was every opportunity for the parties to make such representations as they wished as they saw the Government's ideas developing.

Over the past two and a half years it was right to consider very carefully what further measures, including those requiring a Bill, should be introduced before the local government elections in May 1985. We were urged by some quarters to take such measures before the European Assembly elections this year. Indeed, until the last few days I understood that the Ulster Unionist party was in favour of action to reduce the scope for personation. The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley will recall that in September 1981 he wrote drawing attention to what he called widespread electoral malpractice in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone byelections. He also wrote to the Attorney-General expressing his concern.

At this time last year, the Ulster Unionist party was in touch, and made three approaches to the Government urging that there was a need to introduce some form of identification prior to a ballot paper being issued to a voter. The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) is also on record as calling for some form of identification to deal with personation. Thus, we can at least agree that there is no disagreement between us about the end that we should have in mind. The disagreement is limited to the practical means by which we can bring it about within the timescale that we face in meeting the local government elections in May 1985.

The right hon. Member for South Down predictably and forcefully made the point that the Bill should be applied throughout the United Kingdom, if it is to be applied anywhere. But there is no evidence of widespread electoral abuse at the moment in Great Britain, although we listened carefully to what my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) said. Obviously, the Home Secretary will listen to any such representations, but no real representations have been received by the Home Office to suggest that electoral abuse is widespread in Great Britain. Indeed, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the number of tendered ballot papers and arrests for electoral malpractice on this side of the water is so small that the Home Office does not even keep the statistics centrally.

Mr. Peter Robinson: There is no evidence of widespread electoral abuse in half of the constituencies in Northern Ireland so why apply the legislation to them?

Mr. Scott: With great respect, I pointed out earlier that there is widespread electoral abuse in Northern Ireland and we cannot apply the legislation to an area smaller than the political entity of Northern Ireland. That should be common ground between us all.

Mr. Bruinvels *rose*——

Mr. Scott: Of course I regret the need for another difference between the electoral law on this side of the water and that in Northern Ireland, but let us not pretend that in other respects the electoral law in Northern Ireland is exactly the same as that which obtains in Great Britain. There are several very substantial differences, many of which were introduced by Northern Ireland Governments before direct rule. So there are differences, and it is accepted that there should be between the two systems.

However, the House must decide which is the lesser of two evils: to have another difference between the electoral system in Northern Ireland and that which obtains here, or to allow the democratic process to be undermined by those who seek to poison and destroy it. I have no doubt about what decision I would ask the House to make. The right hon. Member for South Down made another point that is, in a sense, included in the amendment. It is suggested that the whole burden of responsibility should be placed on the shoulders of the presiding officers by giving them greater discretion to deal with these matters. Presiding officers are temporary, voluntary officials drawn from the general public. We should not ask them to become involved in the inter-party contest. It would not be right for them to be given general discretionary powers of disfranchisement. Presiding officers would not welcome being given such powers. The parties must protect their candidates' interests and the RUC, which now has powers to intervene, must be able to take action against a personator. It would not be right, fair or proper to put that extra burden on presiding officers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) talked about multiple registration. That is not permitted in Northern Ireland for local and Northern Ireland Assembly elections. The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West referred to police powers. Before the next election, as before any election in Northern Ireland, there will be the closest consultation between the chief electoral officer and the RUC chief constable. The police are aware that the police being involved in the electoral process is a sensitive matter. I am sure that they will behave with sensitivity. We shall monitor what happens and remain in close touch. The right hon. and learned Gentleman was right to raise the matter.

Hon. Members mentioned the extra polling booths to be provided. The judgment about the extra money required was taken after the closest consultation with the chief electoral officer. He said that extra help was needed on that front.

I do not have a closed mind on polling hours. If hon. Members believe that polling stations should stay open an extra hour or two because of the provisions to prevent personation we shall take their opinion into account before coming to a final view. To ensure that electors in Northern Ireland are fully aware of the need to produce certain documents at the polling station, a sustained advertising campaign will be launched.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) asked about tendered ballot papers for those not on the register. That should not arise and we shall draw the attention of presiding officers to his view. If a person is not on the register he certainly is not entitled to vote, either with a proper ballot paper or a tendered ballot paper.

I was asked whether a document issued by a foreign country should be accepted. The franchise for this Parliament extends to citizens of the Republic of Ireland. I see no reason why a passport issued by the Republic of Ireland should not be included.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir J. Biggs-Davison) asked why the offence of having documents for the purpose of personation should be restricted to polling day. The reason is practical. Polling day is the day on which those who wish to subvert the democratic process would collect their documents. If they were caught with them on that day it would be easier to prove that they had them for the purpose of personation.

The Bill represents a departure from the traditional British way of holding elections. I regret the need to introduce it, but that has to be balanced against our determination to reduce the opportunities for personation. The Bill will be widely supported in Northern Ireland by those who have studied what has happened. I commend the Bill to the House and urge hon. Members not to vote for the reasoned amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 14, Noes 170.

Division No. 9] **[10 pm**

AYES

Beggs, Roy
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Kilfedder, James A.
McCrea, Rev William
McCusker, Harold
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Nicholson, J.
Paisley, Rev Ian
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Skinner, Dennis
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. William Ross and
Rev. Martin Smyth.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Bermingham, Gerald
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruce, Malcolm
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garrett, W. E.
Grant, Sir Anthony

Gregory, Conal
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hancock, Mr. Michael
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Harvey, Robert
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hayes, J.
Haynes, Frank
Heddle, John
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hume, John
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Maclean, David John
McWilliam, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Marlow, Antony
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meadowcroft, Michael
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Robert
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Major and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 41 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading).

The House divided: Ayes 167, Noes 14.

Division No. 10] **[10.12 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, William
Bermingham, Gerald
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Browne, John
Bruce, Malcolm
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clegg, Sir Walter
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garrett, W. E.
Grant, Sir Anthony
Gregory, Conal
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Harvey, Robert
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(SW N'folk)*
Hayes, J.
Haynes, Frank
Heddle, John
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hume, John
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter, *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, John
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
Maclean, David John
McWilliam, John
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Marlow, Antony
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meadowcroft, Michael
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mitchell, David *(NW Hants)*
Morris, M. *(N'hampton, S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Robert
Rifkind, Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Skeet, T. H. H.
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spence, John
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stevens, Martin *(Fulham)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, J.
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Lang and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Kilfedder, James A.
McCrea, Rev William

McCusker, Harold
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Nicholson, J.
Paisley, Rev Ian
Powell, Rt Hon J. E. *(S Down)*
Robinson, P. *(Belfast E)*
Skinner, Dennis
Walker, Cecil *(Belfast N)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. William Ross and
Rev. Martin Smyth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Committee tomorrow.

ELECTIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act, resulting from the Elections (Northern Ireland) Bill, it is expedient to authorise any increase attributable to the Act in the sums to be paid out of, or charged on and paid out of, the Consolidated Fund under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

NATIONAL HERITAGE (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Ordered,

That the Bill be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee —*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Dr. Alan Clift

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

10.23 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): One of the basic tenets of British justice is that every convicted and discredited man is entitled to a fair hearing, and if new evidence emerges, he has a further entitlement to a new hearing. It is on those grounds that the case of Dr. Alan Clift should be raised in the House.

The main grounds for concern are that some eminent forensic scientists are claiming that Dr. Clift has been wrongly discredited, both by the judge and by the Home Office, that he was a victim of malice, and that the Home Office failed to carry out proper procedures and so denied Dr. Clift elementary justice. Important information on those issues has been provided by the scientists themselves, and through investigative journalism by Tim Crook of Independent Radio News.

This issue is naturally of great importance to Dr. Clift, and the rights of individuals always concern this House. In addition, Dr. Clift's story has wider implications. The controversy surrounding him reflects the conflicts that undoubtedly exist about the role of the expert in the legal process. Those conflicts must be resolved if we are to have a healthy legal system. First, however, the truth of what happened to Dr. Clift has to be established—and that can only be done by an independent inquiry investigating the full circumstances.

I am asked why I am now taking sides with Dr. Clift after being critical of his work and pressing vigorously for a review of all the cases with which he dealt. My answer —and I emphasise this—is that I am not taking sides with Dr. Clift, but I believe that it would be unfair and grossly unjust completely to accept the public discrediting of a leading Home Office forensic expert now that there is such a weight of distinguished dissent against it. I believe that Dr. Clift ought to have an opportunity to clear his name, that we are all entitled to the truth, and that the only proper recourse is to an independent inquiry.

The independent inquiry should look at four separate areas of concern.

The first is the validity of Dr. Clift's public discrediting by Lord Justice-General Emslie in Scotland, hearing the John Preece appeal. I wish to make it clear that I am in no way suggesting that John Preece was wrongly cleared. The obvious weakness of the case against him was shown by the fact that the prosecution did not proceed with its case at the original English magistrates hearing. He was extremely unfortunate that his case was subsequently pursued in Scotland, where a jury majority of nine to six is sufficient for a conviction. Whether John Preece's justified release should be so dependent on the discrediting of Dr. Clift is a different and more controversial issue. Lord Justice-General Emslie condemned Dr. Clift as a witness whose accuracy, fairness and objectivity could not be relied upon. He did so on two grounds.

First, Dr. Clift had been categorical at the trial that the man who had intercourse with Helen Wills before her murder was a group A secretor. The judge noted that two of the experts giving evidence for the Crown at the appeal disagreed with the theory that led Dr. Clift to this conclusion and, to use the judge's words, they made it clear that the two propositions on which it depended had

[Mr. Jack Ashley]

no "scientific validity." However learned a judge may be, he has to rely on other experts if he wants to criticise an expert, and so it was in this case. Amazingly, Professor Kind, one of the two experts cited, is now saying:

"The judge got it wrong".

and

"He did not understand."

Dr. Kind claims that he did not condemn Dr. Clift as was suggested and that there is public evidence to support Dr. Clift's theory. The other witness, Professor Hennigson, claims that in his evidence to the appeal court he said that although Dr. Clift's conclusion was not absolute or irrefutable there was some evidence for it. That is a very different matter from its having no scientific validity.

Those important statements by people involved cast doubts upon the validity of the condemnation of Dr. Clift by Lord Justice-General Emslie, who for his summing-up relied on his own notes. The doubt should easily be resolved by the study of the transcript of the hearing. But incredibly that cannot be done because there is no transcript. There are only shorthand notes of this appeal. The Solicitor-General for Scotland, to his everlasting shame, said to me today that he has refused to provide a transcript because he is "not persuaded" that the £1,000 cost is justified. Is that not a shocking, disgraceful statement? So much for the price of justice in Britain today.

The judge also condemned Dr. Clift because all the experts agreed that he should have disclosed the fact that Helen Wills was herself a blood group A secretor. Dr. Clift had not done so. The judge suggested that this failure on Dr. Clift's part made it impossible for the defence to discover the blood group and that Dr. Clift was trying to minimise the risk of his opinions being challenged.

Now, startling evidence has emerged. The forensic expert who advised the defence at the original trial says that he was aware that Helen Wills and John Preece were almost certainly both group A secretors. He adds that he was surprised that defence counsel did not ask him to give evidence about this point, on which he was well qualified. Had this been done, he would routinely have checked it with Dr. Clift. So Dr. Clift did not make it impossible for the defence to discover crucial information, as the judge alleged. If Helen Wills' blood group was so crucial that Dr. Clift was discredited for not disclosing it, what blame can be attached to the defence for failing to probe this matter at the original trial?

For his part, Dr. Clift claims that after mentioning the murdered woman's blood group in his first report, which he believed would be available for the defence, he omitted it from the second one for the Scottish court on the advice of the prosecuting counsel. An independent inquiry would look into the reason and responsibility for this omission. The undeniable fact in this confused area is that defence counsel at the original trial did not regard the blood grouping as important because as many as 30 per cent. of the population share the same blood group. Dr. Clift's superior, Dr. Curry, also felt that it was not relevant; yet it was this issue that discredited Dr. Clift. Only an independent inquiry can determine whether or not it should have done so.

The second reason for an independent inquiry, and another area for concern, is the internal Home Office report of six of Dr. Clift's cases. This report was the essence of the case against him which led him to his enforced early retirement.

Dr. Clift asked a number of distinguished scientists to evaluate this report. They included a director of a forensic establishment, and a past president of the Forensic Science Society. I have read their comments, and they are very impressive. The overall conclusion of all these 11 experts was that Miss Pereira's report deserved more criticism than did Dr. Clift's work. There were some points of criticism of Dr. Clift, but not one of the experts supported the basic condemnation of Dr. Clift's professional integrity.

Typical comments were:

"It is perfectly evident that he (Dr. Clift) has received less than justice",

"Opinionated criticism of Dr. Clift's work, being concerned only with trivia",

Nothing that lies outside the boundary of professional comment and judgment"

and

"The report has not shown the impartiality it rightly advocates."

Despite those comments, Dr. Clift was forced to retire by the Home Office. It should be borne in mind that the experts were invited by Dr. Clift to comment on the cases. Nevertheless, they are respectable scientists of integrity. Did the Home Office have undisclosed evidence, or did it simply ride rough-shod over the combined views of these experts? It is highly unsatisfactory for a controversial figure to be forcibly retired, apparently on evidence that has been so effectively questioned. The other side of the affair, if there is one, must be revealed and evaluated. The House, and concerned forensic scientists, have a right to know.

The third area of concern it that is has been alleged that Dr. Clift was the victim of malice. That is a serious charge of which the Minister is no doubt aware, and it must be examined. Dr. Clift worked for the forensic science service from 1953. He was promoted and, as far as is known, he had no adverse annual reports. At the end of July 1977, a new quality control officer arrived at Birmingham where Dr. Clift was working. By 5 September, the new arrival had produced about 15 cases on which to question Dr. Clift. Three days later, on 8 September, Dr. Clift was publicly suspended and his work referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions. The Home Office has said that, "once it became clear" that his work was not of a professionally competent standard, he could not continue as an expert witness. No one can criticise that statement. But how did it take only three days, after 24 years of unblemished service, for professional incompetence to become clear? It was obvious that the publicity involved would finish his public career. It was a sudden and unexpected downfall. Was it justified? The truth is that we simply do not know.

One year later, in October 1978, Dr. Clift was completely cleared by the Director of Public Prosecutions, and Dr. Clift's solicitor claims that the Home Office was told that there was no question of criminal proceedings against Dr. Clift. During this time, Dr. Clift's solicitor alleges that there was a whispering campaign against him, and his waste-paper basket was searched to see whether there were any damaging notes. These allegations should be scrutinised, not by the Home Office, which is directly involved, but by an independent inquiry.

The fourth reason and area of concern is the way in which the Home Office disciplinary procedures were apparently used. There were no informal warnings, no formal warnings, no known adverse annual reports, no chance to improve performance, and documents requested by Dr. Clift's solicitors were refused. Perhaps the Home Office believed that his unusual sequence of events was justified by the unusual nature of the case, but that cannot justify the Home Office being the prosecution, judge and jury, all in secret.

I appreciate that my request for an independent inquiry will not be welcomed by the Home Office. Possibly, there are fears by some officials that it may open a Pandora's box. But the Minister has a clear duty to the House of Commons, as well as to his Department.

I hope that the Minister will not hide behind the tired establishment formula that proper authority has already decided. If he claims that the judge should not be open to criticism, and that a retirement board has considered all the facts, and nothing further should be done, he will be failing to answer the case I have made. By reading a facile brief, he would be insulting the House of Commons. I hope that, if he is unable to agree to the independent inquiry now, he will undertake to go back to the Home Office, carefully consider the case that I have presented and let me have a fully considered reply in due course.

10.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): This is a matter of considerable public interest, and I am glad to see other hon. Members in the Chamber, including my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), who I know has an interest in at least one of the cases that has been considered by the Court of Appeal recently. I must confess to some surprise at the case which the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent (Mr. Ashley) now puts forward for an independent inquiry into the case of Dr. Clift. He has been pressing for such an inquiry for some time, but his grounds for doing so have changed dramatically. Earlier this year, in seeking a debate under Standing Order No. 10, on the Parliamentary Commissioner's report into the Preece case, the right hon. Gentleman referred to the negative response by the Home Office to the discovery. He said:

"that one of its leading forensic scientists was professionally incompetent, made unjustified conclusions and gave meaningless evidence." — [*Official Report*, 26 January 1984; Vol. 52, c. 1069.]

Now the right hon. Gentleman has changed his tune. he says that he is not taking sides, that he is not sure whether Dr. Clift has been done an injustice by the Home Office. He now wants an independent inquiry to help him make up his mind about these matters. What a change from the right hon. Gentleman's earlier views about Dr. Clift which I have quoted. The right hon. Gentleman is trying to have it both ways. I cannot pretend to find that at all creditable.

In answering the call for an independent inquiry, it is important to set out some of the background to this affair which, though familiar to the right hon. Gentleman, may not be so well known to the wider audience interested in this debate.

After a long career in the forensic science service Dr. Clift moved to Birmingham forensic science laboratory in June 1976 to take charge of the biology department. In 1977, as a part of new quality controls introduced by the then controller of the forensic science service, an assistant director was appointed to the Birmingham laboratory. His job was to monitor the performance of scientists at the laboratory by various detailed checks of tests, files and reports. In the course of his examination of one of Dr. Clift's cases he found errors which he drew to Dr. Clift's attention. These errors were corrected, but other cases of Dr. Clift's were also found on examination to be unsatisfactory. These findings were reported to the director of the laboratory and by him to the controller of the service on 1 September 1977.

On the basis of these findings, the controller reported within the Home Office that there was substantial prima facie evidence that Dr. Clift had selected results in writing his reports, had reported results that were clearly wrong and had been guilty of grave technical incompetence. Following discussion of these findings with representatives from the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Dr. Clift was suspended from duty on full pay on 9 September 1977 pending a police inquiry on behalf of the DPP into his Birmingham cases. Early in the course of his investigation, the police officer reported areas where Dr. Clift had failed to maintain the standards expected of him as a scientist. However, the DPP decided on the basis of the officer's final report in 1978 that there had been no criminal intent and that Dr. Clift should not therefore be prosecuted. However, for the avoidance of doubt that is not the same as saying that Dr. Clift should be treated as a fully competent forensic scientist.

The police officer was assisted in his inquiry by Miss Pereira, an experienced biologist. Miss Pereira was then director of the Aldermaston forensic science laboratory. She is now controller of the forensic science service. She had the thankless task of investigating the conduct of a colleague, and she came to the conclusion, after a careful and painstaking inquiry, that Dr. Clift's conduct in a number of cases was not acceptable, and fell below the standards to be expected of an expert witness. She reported those conclusions honestly and fairly, giving examples of poor quality work such as conclusions based on flimsy evidence, failure to disclose full facts, risky decisions, unsound and invalid conclusions, ambiguous reports and other indications of incompetence. Miss Pereira had no axe to grind against Dr. Clift, and was concerned only for the standards of the forensic science service. Her conclusions have subsequently been criticised by Dr. Clift and his supporters. I want to place it on record that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I have the fullest confidence in Miss Pereira's professional judgment and integrity, and have no reason to doubt that the conclusions she reached were the right ones.

Following Dr. Clift's suspension from duty in September 1977, three convicted prisoners petitioned the Home Office to re-open their cases. Two of these cases were referred to the Court of Appeal, which quashed the conviction of one of the two prisoners along with those of two other men convicted with him of robbery and burglary mainly on the evidence given by Dr. Clift.

Mr. Ashley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Mellor: No. There is not sufficient time.

The setting aside of these convictions, among other things, was used by solicitors in support of an application to the Secretary of State for Scotland to refer the case of

[Mr. Mellor]

Mr. John Preece for review by the High Court. Eventually on 17 February 1981, the case was referred to the High Court of Justiciary in Scotland.

The decision of the High Court, allowing the appeal and quashing the conviction, was delivered by the Lord Justice-General on 19 June 1981. The court dealt very fully with the question of the serological evidence given at the original trial and heard expert evidence from a number of outstanding forensic scientists; perhaps, it was suggested, the most impressive body of such experts ever assembled in one court. After considering that evidence the judge concluded that

"Dr. Clift was, in relation to the evidence which he gave at the trial of the secretor status of the semen in the mixed stains, discredited as a scientist."

Furthermore,

"that his testimony upon this very important chapter of the case fell far below the standards . . . normally to be expected and normally displayed by such a witness."

Finally,

"that no reasonable jury would have convicted once it had become clear upon a consideration of the serological chapter of his evidence that Dr. Clift was discredited not only as a scientist but as a witness upon the accuracy, fairness and objectivity of whose evidence reliance could be placed."

On 26 January, in reply to a question from the right hon. Member, my right hon. and learned Friend announced the results of the review of cases in which Dr. Clift gave evidence and his decision that it would be right for him to refer 16 of them to the Court of Appeal under section 17(1)*(a)* of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968. The basis upon which that decision had been taken was made perfectly clear. The cases were those in which, if the evidence given by Dr. Clift at trial was erroneous or false — and my right hon. and learned Friend made no assumption on that point — the convictions might reasonably have been regarded as open to question. It was accepted at the time that the individual cases might in themselves have not warranted reference to the Court of Appeal, and that Dr. Clift's evidence was by no means the only evidence against all the accused persons, but it was felt right that they should have the benefit of any doubt about their convictions and that the Court of Appeal should be asked for its independent and authoritative determination in each case.

Three of the convicted persons indicated that they did not want their cases to be referred and their wishes in the matter have been respected. Efforts to trace two other defendants are continuing. In three of the 11 cases referred to the Court of Appeal earlier this year the appeals were subsequently abandoned by the individuals concerned.

Mr. Ashley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: I shall not give way to the right hon. Gentleman. He exceeded his time.

Mr. Ashley: This is a shocking speech.

Mr. Mellor: Of the remaining eight cases, there were three in which the Court of Appeal quashed the convictions and five in which it dismissed the appeals. In none of the cases referred to the Court of Appeal has the court questioned the earlier conclusions reached about Dr. Clift's competence.

I now come to Dr. Clift's compulsory early retirement. In his case the normal procedures for civil servants—which take some considerable time to complete—could not be used because his professional weaknesses, when they came to light, discredited him as an expert witness able to give evidence to courts. This is the chief function of a forensic scientist. It was not possible for him to continue in his existing work and there was no other work in the Home Office to which he could be transferred. As I have said, his weaknesses came to light as soon as revised quality assurance arrangements were introduced. The weaknesses had not been suspected previously because it had been assumed that an officer of his standing would be scientifically competent and that it was unnecessary to check the integrity of his work.

Although the retirement procedure used in Clift's case was unusual, it was inevitable because the normal procedure was impracticable. It was agreed between the Department and the Institution of Professional Civil Servants, the union representing Dr. Clift, that six specimen cases would be examined in detail to show the Department's objections to Dr. Clift's work, that he would offer his defence and, if this was not accepted, a retirement board would be asked to consider the case for his early retirement.

That procedure was followed. Dr. Clift was given access to all papers, records and statements relevant to the cases under review. The board, consisting of two assistant secretaries who had had no contact with Dr. Clift and two scientists not employed by the Home Office, considered these six cases and concluded that his work was seriously inadequate and unanimously recommended his early retirement. Dr. Clift and his solicitor were given every opportunity to put their case to the board and were invited to appear before it, but they did not accept this invitation. Dr. Clift then appealed to the Civil Service Appeal Board against his retirement. In an unusually long hearing, the board reviewed the procedures that had been used, the case against Dr. Clift and the Department's decision and concluded that the Home Office had acted fairly and that Dr. Clift had not been unfairly dismissed.

Dr. Clift therefore had ample opportunity to present his case against compulsory retirement. Nothing that has happened since then has led the Home Office to conclude that its decision was wrong, or unfair to Dr. Clift. His conduct was carefully examined before he was retired. In all the subsequent proceedings which have flowed from the Clift affair none of the responsible bodies concerned —the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, the Civil Service Appeal Board, the Court of Appeal— has questioned the conclusion reached about Dr. Clift's competence. It is true that Dr. Clift and some of his friends have mounted a campaign to vindicate him, but no new evidence has been produced, and indeed much of what has been said tends only to confirm the correctness of the decision that Dr. Clift was not acceptable as an expert witness. I regret that the right hon. Gentleman has lately lent his name to that campaign. He seems to think that he can act as counsel for the prosecution and the defence in the same case. I and many others do not find that a particularly edifying spectacle.

To sum up, my argument comes to this. In 1981 the High Court of the Judiciary in Scotland delivered a broadside against Dr. Clift of almost unprecedented ferocity. It amounted not merely to a denunciation of his competence in that case, but called into question his standing as a reliable witness in any case.

Faced with that, it has always seemed to me and to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that it was necessary to trawl through those cases of which details were available and where the issue of guilt was contested. As a result, 129 cases were examined in detail and as we know 16 were identified as ones which should be referred to the Court of Appeal.

Those were cases where, in the opinion of my right hon. and learned Friend, the evidence of Dr. Clift was of sufficient materiality that if the evidence was unsound, the conviction might reasonably be regarded as open to question.

That is not to say that we felt that all the convictions were unsafe and unsatisfactory. That is not our job. It is the job of the courts to deal with these matters openly and publicly. It was for us to identify those cases where there was reasonable unease—that is precisely what we did. In deciding to refer those cases my right hon. and learned Friend sought to give the benefit of any doubt to the convicted person. I should make it clear that it has come as no surprise to me that in a majority of them the Court of Appeal has felt that the convictions were perfectly safe, or the appellants have abandoned their appeals.

But we should have been much criticised had we failed to expose to open view those cases where a contrary view was genuinely possible even if not probable. That is what we have done. It has been a painful exercise for all of us at the Home Office and particularly in the Forensic Science Service. But I am convinced that what we have done in the wake of the Preece decision was both wholly necessary and quite right. These matters have been fully ventilated and appropriate procedures have been followed, as I hope I have demonstrated to the satisfaction of the House tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 16 November 1984

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Friendly Societies Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.35 am

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Ian Stewart): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Government were advised in May this year that there were significant doubts about whether a number of friendly society contracts were enforceable at law. At the end of May I therefore announced that we would introduce legislation to protect the position of those who had entered into those contracts in good faith. The legislation would also prevent such doubts arising on future contracts, broadly by restoring the law to what it was previously understood to be.

The legal doubts concern the enforceability of some 300,000 life insurance contracts taken out before 1 June 1984 with certain recently formed friendly societies. The main problem was that the brochures advertising the contracts purported to confer benefits that were almost certainly greater than the statutory limits on tax-exempt contracts, and different in their nature from the types of contract admitted by the rules of the societies concerned. Doubts have also arisen about the way in which the limits should be applied in the case of assurance contracts in which the benefit was linked to investments, and about whether the surrender value of an annuity should be counted against the limit on gross sums. Those doubts apply to friendly societies generally and to the limits on taxable as well as tax-exempt business.

I shall refer to the material clauses of the Bill. Clause 1 deals with the particular problem that arose in respect of 11 societies registered since 1966. It removes doubts about enforceability of past contracts issued by those societies on account of additional terms being imported into the contracts by the way in which the contracts were advertised. The clause enables such additional terms to be disregarded in determining compliance with the statutory limits on friendly societies' tax-exempt life insurance business and in determining the validity of any contract to which the clause applies.

Clause 2 deals with a lesser problem identified for societies generally and redefines the provisions for the future so that the same problems will not recur. It does so by modifying the operation of the limits on an individual's entitlement to tax-exempt benefits from registered friendly societies. Increases in the value of a contract due to investment linking are to be disregarded for the purpose of the limits, in the same way as declared bonuses on with-profit policies are already disregarded. It ties the limits to the sums assured, thus avoiding the need to take account of surrender values. It applies those modifications with retrospective effect, thus removing doubts about existing contracts on both those counts. By abolishing the limits on taxable business, clause 2 also removes doubts about possible breaches of those limits in the past on similar grounds.

Most of the provisions that I announced in May will be in next year's Finance Bill. However, it was important to resolve the legal position without delay. The Government were therefore anxious to introduce the legislation as soon as possible in the Session. The Bill includes only those provisions that could have no place in a Finance Bill, primarily the validation of the existing contracts. The Bill is mainly technical. It is entirely helpful to friendly societies and their members. I therefore commend it to the House.

9.38 am

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): The Bill applies to friendly societies, 4,000 of which were in existence long before 1966. Most are very small, set up during the past 100 years, and some have a longer history. They were working-class, self-help organisations. About 50 undertake taxable business—a very small proportion of that total—and may have about 2 million members between them. Eleven post-1966 societies were set up to undertake a different sort of business. When the limits on tax exempt business were increased in the Finance Act 1980, some friendly societies regarded it as an encouragement to do such business—societies were set up specifically to deal with such insurance policies. When the Government decided to change those limits in this year's Finance Bill, the activities of friendly societies attracted the attention of lawyers. They examined promotional literature and the policies that societies were issuing, and doubts about the validity of some policies arose. That is bound to happen when lawyers closely examine one's activities. No doubt they found uncertainties partly because of the rules of friendly societies.

As the Minister said, the Bill is welcomed by the friendly societies. I took the trouble to contact the National Conference of Friendly Societies to ensure that it was welcomed and that no further questions needed to be raised. The Bill will indeed settle uncertainty and doubt about some policies. A few of the doubts have been dealt with neatly as clause 1 simply excludes promotional literature from counting as part of the contract. Perhaps the same principle could be applied elsewhere.

I have only one point to make—I wish that the Government were prepared to deal with other issues concerning people's money and savings to exclude doubt and uncertainty and to remove the possibility of people losing their savings. I think, for example, of licensed dealers who are now allowed to sell shares over the counter. Shareholders have found that their shares have disappeared and that they have no recompense. The Government's energy and industry in bringing forward the Bill is to be commended. I only wish that they showed the same energy and industry in regard to dealing with abuse and uncertainty in money dealings that affect small investors and savers.

9.42 am

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): I support what my hon. Friend the Minister and the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) have said and I have no criticisms of the Bill. It is clear that political battle is not about to be joined. My hon. Friend said that we shall return to this matter in the next Finance Bill. Although the Bill, which deals with only a small part of friendly societies' activities, is to be commended, there is a case for my hon. Friend to consider the traditional role of friendly societies, especially in cities where there is a long tradition of a combination of skill and working people. That applies to Portsmouth, although it is in the bustling and relatively prosperous south, as much as to northern cities.

The pre-1966 societies have never engaged in the type of activities that the Bill covers. They have never regarded themselves as being in competition with insurance companies or in the provision of mortgages. They have always emphasised their philanthropic role and their aim of mutual self-help.

There are 2 million members of the pre-1966 societies —including 35 of the main societies—and none of them has ever engaged in activities that could be regarded as damaging to the Revenue. They have not sought tax avoidance or to skate on the edge of the law. Will my hon. Friend consider amending friendly societies legislation to ensure that pre-1966 societies carry on their traditional philanthropic role while the newer ones are regarded as what they are—insurance companies? They are not true friendly societies. I do not wish to labour the point but it is important that, when drawing up legislation such as this —which I am happy to support—we recognise the important social purpose that has been fulfilled for many decades by the traditional friendly societies. We should do nothing to weaken their role, nor should we tar them with the same brush as others whose purpose and activities are quite different.

9.46 am

Mr. Ian Stewart: With the leave of the House, I should like to answer some of the questions that have been asked.

With regard to licensed dealers and securities, I hope that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) will wait for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry's White Paper on financial services which will cover many issues relating to investor protection. I am grateful for her welcome for the Bill. The same is true of my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths). I shall consider what he said. I should like to add my own words of approval and support for the traditional friendly societies. The boundary between the pre-1966 friendly societies and later ones is not quite as clear cut as he suggested. Some of the Bill's provisions will also assist traditional friendly societies because of doubts about the application of the limits on investment linking—a problem met by all societies.

What I said about the Finance Bill 1985 was mentioned in my statement of 31 May. My comments are consequential on decisions in the Bill. They go no wider. I listened to my hon. Friend's comments with interest and shall consider what he said.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —[*Mr. Donald Thompson.*]

Committee upon Monday 19 November.

Mineral Workings Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.48 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Neil Macfarlane): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill concerns two issues relating to former mineral workings. Its main purpose — and all but one of its clauses relate to this — is to wind up the ironstone restoration fund now that there is so little remaining ironstone working in England. The second purpose, with which clause 7 deals, enables local authorities to get on to land quickly to take remedial action when they have reason to believe that there is a risk of subsidence because of former underground mineral workings.

The problem with the ironstone restoration fund is that, although its income has dried up with the marked reduction in ironstone working, it is still required to finance agricultural aftercare and afforestation. After 30 years of useful life in which it has almost, but not quite, completed its task, the fund is able to meet its remaining financial obligations only with the help of substantial voluntary assistance from the British Steel Corporation.

The BSC is the only major operator still extracting ironstone in the United Kingdom, and for some years it has been the only operator contributing to the fund. It is already bearing the fund's financial burdens on an informal basis. The time has come to wind up the fund, to transfer such money as will be left to the BSC and to provide for the necessary future aftercare and afforestation.

The fund was set up under the Mineral Workings Act 1951 in response to increasing public anxiety about the dereliction of land in the east midlands ironstone field. The working of ironstone by opencast methods is not a 20th-century phenomenon, but has been going on for centuries. However, the dereliction was new. Until about 1914 ironstone working was confined mainly to the shallower seams of ore, which were cheap and easy to restore by back-filling as part of the extraction process. It was normal to restore the land as extraction progressed, and restoration was usually required by the terms of the operator's lease from the ironstone royalty owner. The pressure for production to meet the demands of the first world war changed that. Operators were driven to work deeper seams, restoration became less easy and more expensive and, inevitably, an increasing quantity of worked ironstone was left unrestored.

By 1950 about 2,500 acres of land were unrestored in Northamptonshire alone. The then Minister for Local Government and Planning, the late Mr. Hugh Dalton, described areas he visited as resembling

"deserts of the moon . . . horrible to behold . . . and bound to have the most depressing effect upon the morale of all those living near them."

The then Government were faced with a serious problem. Their solution was to designate those areas that they considered most vulnerable as the "ironstone district" and to set up the ironstone restoration fund to fulfil three main functions: to meet the full cost of reclaiming the land; to facilitate the full restoration of future workings; and to assist owners and occupiers of restored land to return it to beneficial after-use for agriculture and forestry. Today the fund is administered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The system of finance worked quite well during the years in which the British steel industry was buoyant, but over the years technical and economic developments have reduced the demand for locally dug ore. Contributions to the fund decreased as the rate of extraction fell. As a result the fund is teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. This year the generosity of BSC has come to the fore. It has voluntarily undertaken to pay nearly £400,000 over and above its required operator's levy to keep the fund afloat until 31 March 1985.

Without that contribution from the BSC the fund would be nearly £105,000 in the red. Expenditure in the region of £290,000 is estimated and the Exchequer would have to supplement the regular BSC contributions by a further £600,000 to keep the fund afloat until the end of the current PESC period, which is 31 March 1987.

The fund has done a good job, but it is now at the end of its useful life. The circumstances which gave it birth have been overtaken by events. The small, environmentally irresponsible operators have disappeared from the ironstone scene and have been replaced by a responsible nationalised industry. The pre-1950 dereliction has been restored, and most of the land worked since that date has been repaired and returned to beneficial after-use.

Some land is still being worked for the steel industry, but that is all either within the ownership of the BSC or under its control. All that remains is to complete the aftercare work on a handful of the most recently restored sites. I shall explain how we propose to deal with those in a moment. In short, we believe that the time has come to give the fund a decent burial, which is what the ironstone provisions of the Bill set out to do.

Clauses 1 to 3 and 6 contain provisions to wind up the fund, to transfer its assets to the BSC and to make general house-keeping arrangements to tidy up its final account.

The main meat is contained in clauses 4 and 5, which make arrangements in recognition of the fact that some owners and occupiers, whose land has already been restored with financial help from the fund, still have legitimate expectations from it in respect of the agricultural aftercare or afforestation of their land. I fear that at first sight those arrangements may appear a little arcane. That is because they are essentially transitional provisions and must therefore reflect the rather complicated aftercare arrangements contained in the 1951 Act.

Clause 4 is a transitional provision to honour arrangements which have been made to return land to agricultural use. Under section 20 of the 1951 Act, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food may enter into arrangements with the owners or occupiers of land which has received restoration payments from the fund to make grants for work to bring it

"to a good state of cultivation and fertility."

His expenses in so doing may be defrayed out of the fund.

Most of the section 20 arrangements have already been completed but, as I mentioned earlier, there are still a handful of sites—about 16—on which some aftercare work has still to be done. The purpose of clause 4 is to enable my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to continue to honour those agreements for a transitional period and for his expenses to be met by the BSC.

All of the arrangements must be made before section 20 is repealed on 1 April 1985. Where they relate to the

[Mr. Neil Macfarlane]

aftercare of land restored before 1 January 1984, the arrangements may persist until completion or until 31 March 1990, whichever is the earlier.

The cut-off date has been set at the end of March 1990 because that is five years from the introduction of the transitional arrangements, and because Parliament accepted that five years was a reasonable period for aftercare when it passed section 5 of the Minerals Act 1981. In fact, the reality of our arrangements is a little more generous because land restored by the end of 1983 could have the benefit of six and a quarter years' aftercare, and the statutory cut-off date will not apply to the one or two sites restored after 1983. The arrangements for those may persist for whatever period is specified in the formal agreement.

Clause 5 makes similar transitional arrangements for land which has been restored with the assistance of payments from the fund and is being returned to forestry. The afforestation arrangements are rather different from those made for agricultural aftercare but I am afraid just as arcane because of the 1951 provisions which they reflect.

Under section 25(1) of the 1951 Act, the forestry commissioners may pay a special grant at an agreed rate to assist with the return of worked ironstone land within the ironstone district to a condition suitable for afforestation. The grant does not form part of the normal forestry grant. The commissioners' expenses on that special grant are defrayed from the ironstone restoration fund. The provisions of clause 5 will oblige the BSC to reimburse the commissioners' expenses on that special grant until 31 March 1990, provided that it has been consulted about the rate of the grant.

It is important to recognise that the clause 5 arrangements relate only to the special grant which ironstone landowners and occupiers receive from the forestry commissioners. Their normal forestry grant under section 1 of the Forestry Act 1978 will in no way be disturbed by the transitional provisions of clause 5.

Those then are the ironstone provisions. They have been worked out in full consultation between officials of my Department, the BSC and the Ironstone Royalty Owners Association, which represents the interested landowners. Other Government Departments with an interest and local authorities in the ironstone district have also been consulted. In short, what is proposed is little more than a sensible regularisation of the informal position which, in essence, already exists. But the provisions are framed around the expectation that the fund can be wound up and the new arrangements put in its place in time for the BSC to assume its new responsibilities at the beginning of the next financial year.

The purpose of clause 7 is to give local authorities a power to enter land to survey, monitor or carry out reclamation works where subsidence has occurred or is likely to occur as a result of former underground mineral workings. Any proposal to introduce a new power to enter private land is a matter of obvious public importance and natural concern, and I should like to take time to explain to the House the background to it and why the Government consider the power is needed.

The widespread existence of old limestone workings in parts of the west midlands has been known for many years, but prior to 1978 it was generally thought that, if over time any underground collapse were to occur, it would have little effect on the surface. However, in that year subsidence over deep workings in Sandwell caused substantial damage to industrial buildings, serious enough to cause considerable concern about where else in the area other subsidence from old workings might be threatened. Accordingly, my Department along with the borough councils of Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall and the West Midlands county council commissioned Ove Arup and Partners to carry out a comprehensive study to determine the nature and scale of the problem.

The report was published in July last year. It identified a number of areas of limestone mining which were not suspected previously. It also highlighted the considerable degree of uncertainty regarding the precise extent and condition of many of the workings. I visited several of the worst affected sites and saw at first hand the problems which the authorities and the people of the region must face. I also met representatives of the financial institutions.

An action programme has been set up under the derelict land reclamation scheme with the aim of resolving the problem, and we have appointed an advisory panel, under the chairmanship of Sir Edward Parkes, to assist in this. The local authorities in the area are developing a programme of remedial work that will continue for some years. One of the first things identified as an essential need in the work was the importance of being able to gain access to sites that were found to be at risk, and to take prompt action. Many old mine workings lie below land that is privately owned, sometimes in multiple ownership, and I have no doubt that in most cases the consent of owners and occupiers to enter their land, to survey it and to carry out the remedial work will be freely given. It is obviously in their interests to do so.

However, there will almost certainly be cases—we have evidence of this already—where, through natural reluctance, or because of their absence, the consent of owners or occupiers will not be forthcoming within the necessary time. Delay would put not only their land, but their neighbours' land, at even greater risk. That is why the urgent action that may be required from time to time needs the backing of the new power. As the House will have noticed, the new application of the power is not confined to the west midlands. It will be available, and wisely used, where similar problems may arise. We are already aware of many other areas where there are such workings.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): My hon. Friend says that the power will have a wider geographical application than just the west midlands. Will he make it clear that the Bill affects only those areas listed in schedule 1 and that, despite what clause 7(2) says about,

"underground mining operations other than for coal",

he is talking only about previous ironstone operations, not about the underground mine workings?

Mr. Macfarlane: If my hon. Friend studies my earlier words, he will discover that clause 7 deals with a completely different problem. I am confining my remarks mostly to the problems of the west midlands, but they could occur elsewhere. I shall enlarge upon this matter in a few moments.

The context in which the new powers will be exercised is set out in subsections (1) to (4) of the clause. Hon. Members will note the strictly limited purposes described

in subsection (3) for which the power of entry may be exercised. Subsection (2) defines "relevant operations" by reference to section 89(2) of the 1949 Act. For the immediate convenience of the House, I might mention that these are defined simply as underground mining operations, except coal mining, which have ceased to be carried out.

Subsections (5) to (9) provide fairly elaborate safeguards for the occupier of land to which entry is wanted. Subsection (10) provides a penalty for wilful obstruction. Subsections (11) and (12) contain the important provisions for compensation for loss, damage or disturbance. Subsection (13) is a standard provision for arbitration in case of disputes over compensation.

In speaking to the clause on Second Reading, I should bring two points to the attention of the House. Subsection (5) requires seven days' notice of intended entry to be given to an occupier. The occupier was chosen as being the man on the spot with whom a local authority could deal quickly, whereas, highly desirable though it may be, an owner who is not also the occupier may be difficult to trace, with risk of unwanted delay.

We now consider it essential, to safeguard the rights of owners, that they, too, should be notified. One way of overcoming the problem of the difficulty in tracing owners is to have recourse to the reserve power in subsection (7) for a justice of the peace to authorise entry by warrant if access to the owner cannot easily be obtained. Accordingly, I am happy to tell the House that I shall be tabling an amendment in Committee to secure the requirement that notice of intended entry must be given to the owner as well as to the occupier, with recourse to a justice of the peace in case of serious difficulty in tracing the owner or obtaining his consent.

The second point concerns subsection (3), which authorises entry for the purposes of survey or carrying out remedial works. A local authority's power to carry out remedial works lies in the general derelict land reclamation power of section 89(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Subsection (3), however, does not permit works to be carried out under subsection (2) except with the consent of all persons interested in the land. So that, while the power to enter land without consent, if necessary, to survey it subsists in subsection (3)*(b)* and *(c)* of our clause, the same is not the case, as the text stands, in respect of the power to carry out remedial works without consent. The power of entry on to the land without consent for the purpose of doing works would not be of any practical use if the works could not be carried out because someone with an interest in the land had not given his consent.

Therefore, to make the provisions of the clause fully effective in respect of entry to carry out works, I am proposing to table an amendment to the Bill to override that constraint in urgent cases. I should emphasise that the intention would be to impose strict conditions on the exercise of the power to safeguard the position of owners.

10.5 am

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): I apologise to the Minister and to the House for the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), who should have been here today. He was abroad yesterday on parliamentary business, and I am afraid that he is one of the many thousands of people who are waiting to land at Heathrow airport this morning. His aeroplane is circling somewhere above us, and I am sure his thoughts are with us.

The Opposition take no exception to the Bill as it stands. We shall wish to make a few detailed points in Committee, but by and large we welcome the Bill. I thank the Minister for the clear way in which he explained it to the House.

10.6 am

Mr. Roger Freeman (Kettering): The Bill will have important consequences for my constituency of Kettering in Northamptonshire, and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak during the Second Reading debate. To set the record straight, I assure my hon. Friend the Minister that my constituency no longer resembles the deserts of the moon. My hon. Friend referred to Dr. Hugh Dalton, whose initiative many years ago was important in setting up the ironstone restoration fund. It is appropriate, when one considers the subject of today's debate, that in some quarters of the Labour party he was called the iron Chancellor.

Ironstone working has now stopped in Northamptonshire. It reached its peak in about 1970 when iron ore was needed for the Corby steel works. With the sad closure of those works in 1980, no more iron ore was needed. Although working has ended, the affected landowners and occupiers have a continuing interest in the ironstone restoration fund and the provisions of the Bill for changing the finances for restoration work. It is important for the House to appreciate that there are two sorts of restoration for old ironstone workings. The first is where the old quarries are filled in; as my hon. Friend told the House, that work has largely finished in Northamptonshire. The second aspect of restoration is the aftercare, when the land is brought back into agricultural and forestry use. I am primarily concerned with the aftercare restoration.

Under the Mineral Workings Acts of 1951 and 1971, a tripartite system was set up to administer the ironstone restoration fund. Each of the three parties — the Government, the steel companies and the quarry owners —contributed to a fund to pay for the restoration of the quarries and the additional measures necessary to bring the land back into agricultural and forestry use.

I speak in part on behalf of the Ironstone Royalty Owners Association, which has a direct interest in the winding up of the fund proposed by the Bill. I should say at the outset that I broadly welcome the Bill and commend it to the House. The points that worry me can be dealt with in Committee, and I shall allude to them only briefly now. Before doing so, may I compliment my hon. Friend the Minister and his officials on the fair and open way in which they discussed with the landowners possible changes to the fund. It was much appreciated.

I also congratulate the British Steel Corporation on the expeditious and efficient way in which it restored almost 1,900 acres of open gullets in the Kettering and Corby areas during the past three years. I had practical experience last week of examining some of the restoration work done by the British Steel Corporation in the middle of my constituency, and that has been completed in an efficient manner. As this is only a Second Reading debate, I shall make only a few comments. In Committee, when we give the Bill further consideration, I shall be able to debate these points in more detail.

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

It is important to enshrine in the Bill the essential principle that any variation to arrangements affecting agricultural land agreed between my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and all the interested parties before 1 April 1985 — that date is acceptable to the landowners—shall be made only with the written approval of all the interested parties. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, the Bill provides only that written approval should be obtained from the BSC. Clause 4(2) should include the need for the Minister to obtain also the written approval of the landowners and occupiers. It is important to retain the tripartite system on which the original fund was based.

The Bill is based on limiting the life of arrangements for aftercare of restored land where the basic work—filling in the holes—was completed by 1 January 1984, to a cut-off date of 1 April 1990. I can understand the desire of the Government and BSC to have a definite limitation to the period of financial commitment. That is logical, but I stress that subsidence after restoration work can occur beyond the five years from the completion of that work. What happens if there is subsidence after 1990?

I am sure that the Government will agree that such subsidence may occur. It is undeniable that, for geological reasons, it may do so. The Government's arguments may be that this subsidence may be minor and hence not many landowners will be affected, and that, in any case, if they are affected by subsidence after 1990, they can resort to the land drainage grant system. However, if the drainage grant system disappears, the landowners will be left without any financial support or recourse. I am asking only for an assurance by the Minister—not for any wholesale change in the Bill—and some comforting words that it is not intended to leave the landowners particularly vulnerable after 1990 should they suffer subsidence relating to the original restoration work.

One unknown factor that has not yet been encountered is the consequence of large-scale restoration work completed in a short time. We do not have a precedent, to establish whether and on what scale subsidence may occur.

I am also concerned about the procedure for determining forestry grants. The Bill proposes that the forestry commissioners shall decide on the rate of grants after consultation with the BSC, which ultimately will have to bear the cost. I am referring here to clause 5. I am unhappy that there is no provision in clause 5(1) for an annual review of such grants, which is surely both equitable and practicable, and is also the practice in present arrangements.

I am also concerned that there is no provision for the Forestry Commission to consult representatives of the landowners as defined in clause 4(1) of the Mineral Workings Act 1971. Is it not reasonable to ask that the Government should consult not only the ultimate payers of the grant — BSC — but also the recipients? The recipients of the grant have a legitimate right to be consulted as well.

I support the Bill, but I hope that the Minister will give us at least an assurance that he will review my points before we discuss them in detail in Committee. At that stage I hope not only to bring up these points but several other detailed points raised by the Northamptonshire county council, which has been in recent communication with me.

10.15 am

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): I had not intended to intervene, because I had no reason for doing so other than to give my support to the proposals for restoration in areas where there has been ironstone working, but my hon. Friend the Minister replied very sharply to what was a modest request for information, and one wonders why he should respond in quite such a manner if the answer to the question is not as I might have feared.

I shall confine my comments to clause 7. It is reasonable on Second Reading to ask just what is the extent of the Bill's operations and whether, within the confines of what is intended to be a fairly narrow measure for restoration in carefully defined geographical areas, there is a power which may be used by local authorities in other contexts to examine areas which have been used for the working of ironstone.

Clause 7 applies where a local authority has been given certain powers

"for the purpose of reclaiming or improving land"—

in which

"relevant operations have been . . . carried out".

In subsection (2) "relevant operations" are defined, not as limestone workings, but as

"underground mining operations other than for coal."

That is a wide definition. If the geographical limitations are not specifically those set out in schedule 1, this may have enormously wide ramifications and would be an extension of the powers which local authorities already have to enter land. If that is intended, it should be spelt out clearly on Second Reading.

I press the point about geographical areas because, if I do not misquote my hon. Friend the Minister, both in his original comments and in his response to me he said that the clause would have a much wider operation than merely in the west midlands. Would it not be simple for my hon. Friend, in replying to the debate, and in response to a direct question, to say that it will apply to those areas listed in schedule 1? We shall then all know where we are, and those of us who have an interest in the powers of local authorities other than in the restoration of ironstone workings will not have our fears raised.

It is desirable, before we vote on Second Reading, to know that it is intended that the Bill will apply only to the geographical areas delineated in schedule 1, and that in so far as it applies to mining operations other than those for the mining of limestone it will be limited to such mining operations within those geographical areas.

10.19 am

Mr. Macfarlane: I thank the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) for taking the place of his hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), whom we hope will have a successful landing and will be returned to the House as quickly as possible. I know that the hon. Gentleman is most diligent. I understand the circumstances of his absence and I look forward to his participation in Committee.

I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) to study what I said earlier. All the assurances and guarantees that he and I want are contained

in the Bill. I have hinted that I shall have to draft amendments for Committee to ensure that those provisions are honoured.

The new application of the power is not confined to the west midlands. There could be other problems elsewhere. My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) asked what would happen if there were subsidence after 1990. There may be a longer-term problem, which the Government and local authorities will have to work together to overcome.

The current problem has been prompted by difficulties in the west midlands and no one should underestimate them. We have a responsibility to ensure that if such problems arise elsewhere we have the necessary powers and safeguards available to us. That is why I shall be tabling amendments.

Most provisions of the Bill apply only in the ironstone district, but clause 7 applies to the whole of England and Wales. I am convinced that we need the powers in that clause to ensure that problems do not arise again.

This is essentially a two-purpose Bill. The first and essential purpose is to wind up the ironstone restoration fund, and the second purpose is to empower local authorities to enter land for the purpose of surveying, monitoring and carrying out remedial work when they have reason to believe that there is a risk of serious subsidence because of instability caused by former underground mineral workings. The scene could be wider than the west midlands and we must be vigilant.

I am grateful for the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering. We are not poles apart on many of the points that he raised and I shall consider some of his suggestions. There is a system, involving my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to ensure that grants can be made.

As for the tripartite arrangement on notification and discussion, I am the most malleable of Ministers on a Friday morning and I should like to consider what my hon. Friend said and come back to him in due course.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

MINERAL WORKINGS [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Mineral Workings Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(1) any expenses of the Secretary of State incurred in paying sums to the British Steel Corporation in respect of ironstone extracted by operators in the financial year ending on 31st March 1985;

(2) any expenses of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food incurred (whether in the form of grant or otherwise) under arrangements to bring worked ironstone land to a good state of cultivation and fertility.—*[Mr. Donald Thompson.]*

WAYS AND MEANS

Mineral Workings

Resolved,

That any Act resulting from the Mineral Workings Bill may—

(a) require the British Steel Corporation to pay to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food sums equal to expenses incurred by him (whether in the form of grant or otherwise) under arrangements to bring worked ironstone land to a good state of cultivation and fertility, and

(b) provide for the payment of those sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Donald Thompson.]*

SOCIAL SERVICES

Ordered,

That Mr. David Crouch be discharged from the Social Services Committee and Mr. Steve Norris be added.—*[Mr. Fox, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Sheltered Accommodation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Donald Thompson.]*

10.23 am

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): When I applied for this debate, I knew of one or two cases of constituents who were aggrieved, but my researches in the past few days have disclosed that the unhappiness is much more widespread.

As most people know, residence in hospital under the NHS is provided free and no charge is made for accommodation or food, although those on pensions receive a reduced rate after a period of time. However, those who are well enough to leave hospital, but not well enough to live alone, are provided for by the state in social services residential accommodation administered by the local authority.

Local authorities provide such accommodation for elderly people and others under part III of the National Assistance Act 1948. Under section 22 of the Act, local authorities are required to fix a standard charge for their accommodation, the idea being that it should be the economic cost of providing that accommodation. If the resident cannot afford to pay the full charge, local authorities are required to assess his or her ability to pay and to charge accordingly.

However, the charge must not fall below a prescribed minimum rate—currently £27·25 per week, which will rise to £28·85 on 26 November. That amount is always equal to the standard rate of retirement pension, less a specified sum for personal requirements.

In assessing someone's ability to pay, the local authority is required by section 22(5) of the 1948 Act, as amended, to give effect to part III of schedule 1 to the Supplementary Benefits Act 1976, which is used in assessing eligibility for supplementary benefit. In fact, for supplementary benefit purposes, that has been replaced by new provisions in the Social Security Act 1980, but the earlier provisions have been saved for the purposes of charging for accommodation.

Paragraph 17 of schedule 1 to the 1980 Act provides:

"In taking account of the value to any person of an interest in the dwelling in which he resides, any sum which might be obtained by him by selling that interest, or borrowing money upon the security of that interest, shall be disregarded."

Under paragraph 20 of the schedule, £1,200 of capital is disregarded. Above that, a weekly income of 25p for each complete £50 is assumed. That assumes that an interest rate of 26 per cent. after tax—about 35 per cent. before tax — can be obtained. I cannot imagine where one could obtain such a rate of interest from a reliable source.

The problem is deciding when someone does not, in practice, reside in a house any longer. In 1978 the DHSS published a memorandum of guidance "Residential Homes Under Part III of the National Assistance Act 1948: Charging and Assessment Procedures", which is still current guidance. It says in paragraph 17:

"It is for local authorities to decide in the light of the circumstances of each case whether a person provided with residential accommodation has effectively given up residence in a dwelling in which he retains an interest and accordingly whether—and at what stage—the value of his interest in it should cease to be disregarded under paragraph 17 of Schedule 1 to the Supplementary Benefits Act 1976."

The memorandum goes on to say that once a property ceases to be considered the place in which the resident of the home resides, the value of his interest in the dwelling should be treated as capital. Normally, the only exception would be if a spouse or a child under 16 continued to live in the house. However, the memorandum says in paragraph 20:

"Local authorities have no power to compel a resident to sell his property so as to pay the assessed charge out of available resources. When a resident declines to sell, however, it is reasonable for the authority to suggest that a charge be placed on the property that would enable them to recover the accrued balance of the charges, including any interest at an agreed rate, when the property is finally sold (possibly after the resident's death). Residents should be advised or assisted to consult a solicitor about this procedure."

That means that local authorities can allow unpaid charges to accumulate and the debt to be recovered eventually from the estate.

Even then, a DHSS background note "Assessment of Ability to Pay: Capital Value of a Former Dwelling", issued in January 1984, says:

"In general, it is not the practice of authorities to enforce any outstanding debt against the personal representatives of the deceased when this would result in hardship through the sale of the property."

Relatives other than spouses or parents are not liable to maintain someone living in residential accommodation, although they may make a contribution and, in circumstances where the local authority is intending to recover the debt in due course from the estate of the resident, to do so would reduce the size of that debt.

The January 1984 background note points out that there is

"no compulsion on an authority to take into account the value of a former dwelling; in addition to the circumstances in which they should not do so (e.g. because of a resident's liability to maintain a spouse (or a child) they have discretion to ignore or discount such capital assets."

During the Standing Committee debate on the Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudications Bill, my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health explained the circumstances in which that discretion should be used as follows:

"People in residential accommodation on a permanent basis can normally be assumed to have given up residence in their former dwellings. The value of any interest such a person has in that house will normally be treated as part of his capital resources. But there is no compulsion on an authority to take into account the value of the house. In some circumstances an authority definitely should not do so, such as where the house is still being lived in by a spouse or a child. We are giving discretion to ignore or discount such capital assets in such cases. The position of a husband, wife or a dependent child is obvious, but there is another case where the Government believe that it would be entirely reasonable for an authority to exercise discretion. That is where a principal supporter or a carer continues to live in the house. Let me give a hypothetical case. An adult child, or perhaps a friend who was in no way related to the elderly or disabled person, could have spent many years living in the home and looking after the elderly person. It would be wrong if the elderly person went into part III accommodation and the interest of that carer to be disregarded and the local authority to take the value of the dwelling into account when assessing charges so that a sale is forced.

It is not difficult to envisage circumstances in which that discretion should be used. Normal residence and direct support of the elderly person can easily be checked. Furthermore, the elderly person could normally say whether he regarded the house as the only home of the person who had cared for him and whether he assumed that 'the carer' would be the beneficiary on his death.

When we make the new assessment regulations on which we are about to consult, we firmly intend to make provision for the continued exercise of local government discretion and to indicate that relevant circumstances should be taken into account. We believe that the circumstances such as I have described should

be taken into account by local authorities and we shall seek to cover that in the regulations." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 19 April 1983; c. 574.]

The January 1984 background note says that it would be difficult to codify the circumstances in which the value of the home should be ignored without widening its scope to cover the home in all circumstances

"hence the present discretionary nature of the provision."

It therefore appears that, although the local authority can take account of the value of the interest of a home resident in a house, it is not obliged in all circumstances to do so. If it takes it into account it cannot compel the sale of the property, and it can agree that the debt should mount up to be paid eventually out of the estate of the home resident. In January 1984 the DHSS issued a consultative paper on charges for residental accommodation that is provided by local authorities under part III of the National Assistance Act 1948. The document says that it is proposed that

"where a local authority judges it appropriate, the value of a former dwelling or of other property should be taken into account."

It goes on to discuss circumstances in which the value of the home should be disregarded. It says:

"It is proposed also that the regulations should specify the circumstances in which the value of the family home must be disregarded and when a local authority has discretion to include its value in a charging assessment. Normally people who are in residential accommodation on a permanent basis can be assumed to have given up residence in their former dwelling and the value of any interest that person has in the property will be treated as part of his capital resources. However, the capital value of a resident's former home will be disregarded where a spouse, or a child under 16 years of age, continues to live there as his normal place of residence. For this purpose, it is proposed that the regulations should treat on the same basis as spouses all long-standing relationships in the same residence—irrespective of the sex of the partners and the nature of the partnership. The value of the property should be disregarded also where it has been and remains the permanent residence of a principal supporter. The latter, in addition to providing care, may also have been the financial mainstay of the household."

No decisions have yet been announced following the consultation period and the DHSS has not announced any date for the commencement for the operation of that system.

There is no doubt that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister was right to say what he said in Committee. There is no doubt, either, that the present situation is causing great upset and misery to many elderly people who are not able to take care of themselves. Admittedly the regulations make provision for local authorities to have a solicitor consulted on behalf of the person concerned, but, of course, that is not always easy, particularly where the person taken into care is senile and cannot look after himself. Therefore, several issues need to be carefully considered, and the Government must pay special regard to them.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. John Patten): I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend, as I know he is anxious to get on with his speech, but will he accept from me, on behalf of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, that we are very concerned about the point that he has made? We are particularly concerned that elderly people should not be upset or worried by the misapprehensions that my hon. Friend has described. We shall certainly bear everything that he has said very much in mind.

Mr. Thorne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for saying that. Perhaps I can do no better than illustrate my case by a recent example that was brought to my attention. It involves two elderly sisters, one aged 76 and the other just over 80. The older sister was taken into part III accommodation. I received correspondence from the younger sister, a Miss Gladys Lane, who used to live in Eastern avenue, Newbury Park, in my constituency. The house in which she lived with her older sister was the family house, and it had been owned by their parents. The family moved into it in 1934 and it was eventually passed on to the older sister. The two sisters lived together, sharing expenses on a 50-50 basis. Eventually the older sister had to be taken into a council home.

Through ignorance, the ownership of the property was vested in the older sister and the younger sister had no title to it. Although the older sister had left the property in her will to the younger sister and the younger sister quite naturally expected to inherit it in due course, she was in for a nasty shock. When the older sister went into a home, she was asked to pay the sum of £111·30 a week. That sum has now risen to £116·14 a week. To those ladies, that was an enormous sum. It was impossible for them to pay that money out of their normal income. The younger sister, who was left in the home in which she had lived since 1934, approached the local housing aid centre in York road, Ilford. She was offered a single person's bed sitting room with a shared bathroom. She objected to that offer and went to the citizens advice bureau, which found her a good solicitor.

After several months of negotiations the local council consented to the sale of the house and the purchase by the younger sister of—in the council's words—accommodation more suited to her needs. Miss Lane found the flat in which she now lives. It consists of a lounge, bedroom, kitchen and bathroom. She has settled in and has no complaints about it. However, a charge has been placed upon the flat by the local authority which must be repaid if she ever sells it. There was a difference of £6,000 between the proceeds of the sale of the house and the cost of the flat, after all the legal expenses had been paid. The council took every penny of this money and now has the deeds of the flat.

Miss Gladys Lane naturally feels that the law is cruel and unjust. She is unaware that hers is not an isolated case. According to the advice that she has received from the CAB and from her solicitor, the practice is widespread. The CAB advisers have told her that they constantly have to deal with similar cases involving sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and other family members living in properties which are legally occupied by a close relative. When the owning relative has to be taken into care, the family members find that they have no legal right to the property or interest in it of any kind.

In Miss Lane's case the council decided, as she had lived in the house for so long and it had been the family home, to allow her to purchase a small flat. However, Miss Lane, who was in her mid-70s, had to have a major fight with the council to persuade it to agree to that. She is most anxious that others in similar circumstances should not find themselves in the same predicament.

Miss Lane makes the point that she has never claimed anything from the state and had had no intention of doing so. She feels herself to be at a grave disadvantage in that this matter is hanging over her head. She feels that there is no just reason why that should be so.

[Mr. Thorne]

Moreover, Miss Lane's older sister, who is now in a council home, is a former civil servant. She had worked in the GPO telephone service all her life, and her pension is now paid by British Telecom. The money is paid into a Girobank account in the joint names of the two sisters. The older sister's pension amounts to about £165 a month and this, with the state pension, is her sole income. The younger sister, Miss Gladys Lane, has had to make an arrangement with the council whereby every quarter a cheque for £480 is paid over to the council to offset a portion of the debt which is building up for her older sister's keep in the home. Miss Lane is very worried about that. By 13 October this year the amount had risen to no less than £2,965·12 in spite of all her efforts to reduce it as much as possible. Through having lived throughout their lives without calling upon the state for support at all, the sisters are now debtors to part of the state system—through no fault of their own—to the extent of almost £3,000.

One might consider that that was enough—but no. Of the older sister's state pension, she receives only roughly £6·80 a week as pocket money. She still has to pay income tax on the pension which she receives from BT before the balance is shunted on to the council. The situation is appalling.

These elderly ladies have lived a life of hard work, dedication, effort and thrift. Our present Government do all that they can to encourage thrift. They encourage people to own their own homes. In view of the increasing number of us who are moving into the home-owning sector, I believe that such problems will increase in number.

Several matrons of elderly people's homes have told me that they do not like elderly people entering their homes with money raised either from their own assets or through the sale of their house, because such people enter the home feeling very resentful about the way in which the money has been taken away from them. Matrons have told me that, in their view, these elderly people should spend the money before they enter the home. They should go on a world cruise, ending up at Monte Carlo, and have a good time. They should get rid of everything they have, because no distinction is made between whether they finance their stay in the home or whether the DHSS and the ratepayer do so. That is a strange philosophy, and one which I do not believe the Government would normally wish to encourage.

However, there are other matters which we should consider. My hon. Friend may tell me that the local authority has discretion in the matter and can find part of the cost out of the rates. Some local authorities have been more profligate than others. The two elderly sisters live in the London borough of Redbridge, which has been Conservative-controlled for the past 20 years and has been extremely careful in balancing its budget. The council has made sure that it has not spent more than necessary, and the ratepayer has benefited. When such a council is then told to reduce its budget further, it finds it difficult to do so, because it has already cut spending to the bone.

The leader of Liverpool council was crowing on television last night about the fact that his council had rebelled against the Government and forced them into allowing the council an additional £30 million last year. Redbridge is not in that happy state. The council tries to follow not only the letter of the law, but the wishes of the Government about cutting back on expenditure and reducing manpower. There is therefore now no fat to cut away, and the council must look after every penny. It is therefore not able to give way on matters of discretion as easily as local councils which have built up a reserve of fat over the years.

If the Government wish to encourage thrift through investment particularly in home ownership, they must face the problems that could arise when one of the occupants of a property goes into part III accommodation. They must lay down strict guidelines, if necessary reinforced by law, to detail specifically what should happen to a property which has been occupied for some years by a companion, and especially if that person is a close relation.

If a companion has been sharing that accommodation for five or 10 years, or even longer, a legal entitlement to a 50 per cent. interest in that property should be written into the regulations. Such a person should be treated as a spouse. It is only through the support that is given by such people that the state is saved a great deal of money over many years. Such care prevents the other person having to go into hospital or part III accommodation at a much earlier date. I do not believe that to introduce such a measure would be charity—it would be doing the right and proper thing.

If a person goes into part III accommodation, we should make provision for him to make a capital payment. The cost of part III accommodation could easily be calculated. The person going into that accommodation should be able to buy an interest in it so that when he leaves that accommodation, either because of death, going into hospital or because he is taken out of care, the district valuer would find it feasible to reassess the value of that person's interest in the accommodation, and he or his estate could be reimbursed. The elderly person would not then feel aggrieved at the constant drain on his resources of between £5,000 and £6,000 a year at current prices. That person would have owned a part of the home in which he lived.

Of course, there would be the running costs of the home and the supervision required, which would be recurring charges. They could be set against the capital assets in due course if there were insufficient resources to fund those also. I see no reason why the elderly should not be given the right and the dignity to own an interest in the property they occupy for the remainder of their lives. It is what the Conservative party stands for—property ownership and the dignity of the elderly. The Government would be doing the right and proper thing if they extended home ownership into part III accommodation and allowed people to own an interest in it.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will throw some further light on the appalling position in which so many elderly people find themselves. They are worried about receiving a bill of such magnitude day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year, which mounts up to sums that are quite foreign to them because some of them retired many years ago. Sums in three or four figures worry them. We should try to lift the burden from those people and save them from taking the matron's advice and throwing it all away.

10.54 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. John Patten): In

raising the question of charges for local authority residential accommodation my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) has raised an important and complex subject, and has done so with characteristic thoroughness and a pragmatic approach. It reminds me of the way in which he dealt with the last social services questions, not only in his capacity as an hon. Member, but as chairman of the National Council for Civil Defence. He mentioned the important issue of civil defence planning, and the effect on that of plans within the DHSS.

I welcome what my hon. Friend had to say this morning. I hope to clarify at least some of the misunderstandings about current arrangements. My hon. Friend drew attention to an apparent anomaly — that people admitted to local authority residential accommodation are required to pay towards its cost, while those in long-stay geriatric accommodation are not so required. My hon. Friend gave two excellent and telling examples of two elderly sisters residing in his constituency. We wish them well. It is right that time in the House is devoted not only to main issues but to the welfare of individuals.

The requirement on local authorities to provide residential accommodation for those

"who by reason of age, infirmity or any other circumstance"

are in need of care and attention that is not otherwise available to them dates back to the National Assistance Act 1948. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends who are now filling the Benches in the Chamber will be sorry not to have heard my hon. Friend make his point on that important issue.

The purpose is to provide accommodation for those no longer able to live in their own homes, even with the support of community services such as home helps and meals-on-wheels. It was never the intention that the state should relieve people directly of the cost of their accommodation and upkeep. Rather, the 1948 Act provides that those who enter residential accommodation —currently more than 100,000 people—should meet the cost of providing that accommodation to the extent that their means make that practicable.

The NHS was, of course, established for quite different purposes, and on the basis that health services are, in general, free at the time of need—something on which the Government set great store. The vast majority of patients receive treatment from their general practitioners or on an outpatient basis. It is true, unfortunately, that some patients are destined to spend the last years of their lives in hospital, despite the magnificent efforts made by consultant geriatricians, geriatric nurses and others to ensure that as many as possible are rehabilitated to the community or other long-term accommodation. To that extent, the position of the elderly patient in a geriatric ward, for whom there is no possibility of discharge, is similar to that of the elderly residents of an old people's home.

We have considered instituting "hotel charges" for NHS patients, but have rejected that essentially because hospitals are not geared for the billing and collection of debts on a large scale, especially as there would be exceptions for those in receipt of supplementary benefit, family income supplement and other forms of help from the social security system. I see my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security nodding. For such a charge to be worth collecting it would have to be set at a fairly high level, with the risk that it would deter people from seeking necessary treatment.

The Government have set their face against that. There are, however, provisions under which long-stay patients receiving retirement pensions and all other national insurance benefits which contain an element for day-to-day living have their benefits reduced after a certain period in hospital.

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 5 (Friday sittings).*

British Telecom

The Minister for Information Technology (Mr. Geoffrey Pattie): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a further statement about the privatisation of British Telecom.

This morning, Kleinwort Benson Ltd. on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has offered for sale 3,012 million ordinary shares in British Telecom plc at a price of 130p per share. The issue has been fully underwritten. Discussions are now taking place with a group of financial institutions, and I am hopeful that, within the next few hours, the shares being offered in the United Kingdom will have been fully applied for. Subject to the successful outcome of these discussions, the institutions will retain just over half these shares and the remainder will be made available for public offer next week. Prospectuses will be published on Tuesday 20 November, and the last date for applications will be 10 am on Wednesday 28 November. Copies of the prospectuses will be placed in the Library of the House today.

Of the shares on offer, 415 million, which is just under 14 per cent., have been provisionally allocated for issues to be made in New York, Tokyo and Toronto, and these are being underwritten by the Bank of England.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I thank the Minister for coming to the House to make the statement, although it is marginally disconcerting, as the hon. Gentleman will understand, to be handed a revised version two minutes before the statement was delivered.

This is an incredible day—a day when a Government who pretend to be worried about the future of high technology are announcing the price at which they intend to hand over to the whims of short-term profit maximisation the very industry that will be at the centre of the information technology revolution. It is a day when the Government are taking a public monopoly, which is answerable to Parliament, this House, the Minister and the Select Committees, and are creating a private monopoly that will control 95 per cent. of the telecommunications network and will be answerable to no one other than its shareholders. *[Interruption.]* Well, at the moment it is answerable to 55 million people.

While the price of 130p is precisely what I forecast in a broadcast two days ago, I repeat what I also said at that time: it is the wrong price. Are the Government aware that the very City experts who are advising the Government firmly expect that when those shares are traded on the stock exchange they will start trading at a premium of at least 10 per cent.? Does the Minister realise that that price will mean that the Government are selling control of more than £16 billion worth of public assets for less than £4 billion?

Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, in addition to his price error, the combined cost of advertising by British Telecom this year and by the Government in relation to the launch and the commissions that will be paid to the underwriters and the banks will be at least £100 million and probably nearer £150 million — all to the Government's friends in the City? Is it not true that, behind the Government's boast that they intend to extend share ownership, they are taking this asset, which will earn £1·3 billion in profit this year, from the 55 million people of Britain who own it at present in order to sell it at a knockdown price to a relatively small proportion of those people?

Finally, is it not already clear, before British Telecom is sold, that the Government's guarantees are absolutely meaningless? The Minister has said that 14 per cent.—415 million shares—have been provisionally allocated for sales overseas. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that another 3 per cent.—90 million shares—will be bid for within this country out of the British tranche by an overseas consortium? Is there any control over such bids by other consortia? What action do the Government intend taking to stop the erosion of any control on the sale overseas?

Finally, in relation to these guarantees——

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Another one?

Mr. Williams: Yes, I am referring to the same guarantees. Have we not already seen the hollowness of the Government's pledge to domestic users that privatisation will mean that, for five years, prices will be cut to at least 3 per cent. below the cost of living? We have already seen, in anticipation of privatisation, increases of 7·1 per cent. for domestic rentals and 6·8 per cent. for domestic unit charges — both well above the cost of living — and reductions in prices for primarily trunk business users.

Mr. Pattie: The right hon. Gentleman has told the House that this announcement will have the remarkable effect of making British Telecom answerable to its shareholders, which, in his mind, is supposed to be a retrograde step. The Government believe that this step, which shows that it is bigger than all the Government's privatisation measures so far, will make British Telecom even more commercially aware than it has been. In future, British Telecom will have to satisfy both its customers and its shareholders. Apparently, the right hon. Gentleman thinks that does not matter.

The message that should go from the House is that we wish the chairman of British Telecom, his employees and the new shareholders after 3 December every success in making this the vigorous enterprise in the private sector that we know it will be. The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) will understand the reasons why I cannot enter into any speculation about price considerations at this stage.

Sir Anthony Grant: Will my hon. Friend totally disregard the niggardly and preposterous objections from the Opposition about a policy that is entirely welcomed by Conservative Members and is designed to get the clammy hand of the state away from future technological industries? Conservative Members wish the policy every possible success.

In view of the Government's enthusiasm for wider share ownership and the spread of ownership, will there be any provisions to ensure that the many small investors will not find that their applications are swamped and the issues hogged by big business investors?

Mr. Pattie: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his words of welcome. I can assure him that, as the Government's aim in this matter is to spread share ownership as widely as possible, the requests and applications of the smaller investor will be given priority wherever possible.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): Will the Minister be a little more forthcoming? He ended by saying, "wherever possible". If the issue is over-subscribed, who will make the decisions on the allotment of shares? On what basis will that allotment be made? There will be many dissatisfied small investors if they find that, having been encouraged to buy shares in this institution, their applications are turned down. Will the Minister comment on the view held in the City that, if any other share issue had been handled in this way, it would have been illegal? Will he consult his colleagues and look into the possibility of extending the type of share offer that has been made in this case to other share offers so that a wider public can come forward to buy shares in other institutions?

Mr. Pattie: The precise basis of the allocation to which the hon. Gentleman referred will be decided by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I have said already, and I am happy to repeat it, that the Government are committed to wider share ownership and that we value small shareholders.

The hon. Gentleman made a rather serious point about possible illegalities. I should like to consider what he said. Perhaps he would like to write to me about it.

Mr. Rob Hayward (Kingswood): Does the Minister find the statement from the Opposition Front Bench particularly surprising in view of the fact that, during the Committee stage of the Telecommunications Bill, we were persistently told that the share offer to the public would be grossly under-subscribed because no one would find it attractive? Is it not a reflection of the expertise of all the BT employees that they have managed to convey to the public at large that they are now working for a modern communications system, and that large numbers of people in this country and abroad now wish to subscribe for shares in BT?

Mr. Pattie: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. His reference to a change in attitude within BT is well substantiated, not only by the advent of privatisation but by the whole concept of greater competition which results from having other people coming into the market. It has produced a tangible improvement in the performance of BT. He is right in saying that the offer has created a great deal of interest here and abroad, because BT is a very powerful British and international company.

Mr. John Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Is it not a disgrace that BT shares are being sold to the Yanks and the Japanese? Is it not a disgrace also that BT is now inviting three foreign equipment companies to tender for equipment for BT?

Will the Minister make it crystal clear to people abroad that when the Labour party renationalises BT it will do so in the interests of the taxpayer, the customer and the equipment manufacturing industry, and not in the interests of shareholders?

Mr. Pattie: The hon. Gentleman's line is somewhat predictable. We believe that investment in Britain is not a disgrace. The investment is not cajoled; it comes here because it wants to come here.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned equipment for BT. I am aware of the contract to which he referred. On the merits of that application, BT has decided that for the second source — the first source having been totally British—it wishes to invite further applications from the three consortia.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned what I regard as the remote and distant — not to say inconceivable — possibility of renationalisation by some future Labour Government. We believe that the interests of the taxpayer, the customer and the British manufacturer are totally safeguarded by the steps taken today.

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): Will my hon. Friend agree that the history of recent privatisations—for example, British Aerospace and Cable and Wireless — shows that the employee shareholding is a crucial element in the operation? The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) mentioned accountability. Will my hon. Friend agree that the attitude of people who work in such companies and who have had such opportunities is wholly beneficial? Does it not hold out high hopes in that respect for the future of BT?

Mr. Pattie: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments, because he takes a close interest in these matters. People who are prepared to accept the evidence of their eyes and ears will know that what he said is correct. When people appreciate that they are working for a company in which—as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) said—the clammy hand of the state is not guiding all the marketing and commercial decisions, and that they have better possibilities and opportunities, their performance and that of the company improves accordingly.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Does not the Minister realise that he is flogging off the interest in investment, already made in BT by the 55 million people of this country, to a small number of people for their own private interest? Does he not understand that this doctrinaire attempt to widen the basis of share ownership is bound to fail once those shares become available on the open market?

Mr. Pattie: I cannot see why it is wrong for ordinary people in this country to be given the opportunity to own part of a major national undertaking. The hon. Gentleman is making a forecast about the market for share dealing, and I dare say that his opinion is as good as that of anyone else, but the incentives, including those being offered in regard to telephone bills, will persuade people to keep the shares for all sorts of very good reasons.

Mr. Fred Silvester (Manchester, Withington): Will the Minister agree that those who have had a hand in the share issue have stimulated an interest in share ownership which is far beyond that previously experienced? May I suggest that we learn a lesson from the experience? It is not simply the privatisation programme that is important but the use of it to educate people in the holding of shares.

Mr. Pattie: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend not only for that remark but for his appreciation, which I am happy to echo from the Dispatch Box, of the work of all the people who have been involved in bringing BT to flotation today. We are grateful to our advisers and all the officials who have worked so hard in my Department and in the Treasury. I am also grateful to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), who laboured long and hard to bring the matter to a happy conclusion.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): Now that the sole criterion for this huge organisation is to be profitability, what steps can the Government take to protect the millions of pounds that are paid from the DHSS and other Departments for the benefit of the elderly and the disabled? The standing charges for free telephones for those living alone are now paid by the public. Is there any way in which those charges could be reduced, rather than profitability being the only criterion?

Mr. Pattie: The hon. Gentleman's points will be matters for discussion between the Departments concerned —particularly the DHSS—and the management of BT. Wherever there are what might be described as social considerations, arrangements will have to be made, and the company will say on what basis it wishes to provide those services. The Government have made it clear that they wish them to continue.

Dr. John G. Blackburn (Dudley, West): Will my hon. Friend agree that this is not just a memorable day but an historic day in this House? Will he agree that it is welcomed by Conservative Members, just as it is self-evidently welcomed by the public, because the share issue will be over-subscribed? It is also welcomed by the staff of BT. Will my hon. Friend agree that it is one of the finest ways of ensuring investment from the private sector and relieving the burden on the taxpayer?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It has been a poor Tory turn-out for an historic occasion.

Mr. Pattie: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I agree with him that it is an historic day—although, as the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) says, there could have been more people here to witness it. History is sometimes made when the audience is not very large, but I am sure that we are very happy to have the hon. Gentleman here.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will not the Minister come clean? Is it not true that historically Governments wishing to raise revenue have put up income tax, value added tax or national insurance contributions, whereas this Government cheat by selling off the nation's assets, which have been built up through constant investment over the years? One day the British cupboard of assets will be bare and the Government will then have to face reality. May I say to Labour supporters outside that I hope that they will not buy the shares. If they do, they will be propping up the Government's disastrous financial policies.

Mr. Pattie: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's message will be heard; whether it will be heeded remains to be seen. At the time of the British Aerospace flotation, advice from union circles urged members not to take up the offer. The great virtue of this type of exercise is that it is up to individuals to decide. In that case, individuals decided to take up the allocation of the shares. I am sure that ordinary men and women will take the opportunity that is offered and will disregard the extraordinary advice of the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that they will not regard the exercise as selling off the nation's assets when they will be having a share in those assets.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): I join those who have warmly welcomed the Government's move as part of the programme to restore the nation's assets to the people of the nation. Does my hon. Friend believe that BT employees will subscribe to the shares, and has sufficient allowance been made for that so that they may participate in their own business and have a full sense of involvement and ownership in this great industry?

Mr. Pattie: We believe that the employees will subscribe to the shares. Provided that they apply, there is a free allocation of shares for them as well as a special bonus arrangement in a certain ratio to the shares acquired. It is very important indeed that BT employees respond favourably to the offer and we hope very much that they will do so.

Mr. Skinner: In view of the international selling, are the Government proud of the fact that there is nothing to prevent the Libyans buying shares in BT? What amending legislation is the Minister prepared to introduce to prevent that? The Libyans might well use for that purpose the money that they have obtained from Britain as a result of the Tories' purchase of an extra 400,000 tonnes of Libyan oil. Has the Minister considered the image that may result, with Mr. Gaddafi on one end of the line, Mrs. Thatcher on the other and Buzby in the middle?

Mr. Pattie: I can only assume that by "Buzby" the hon. Gentleman has Arthur Scargill in mind.

Mr. Skinner: You are allowing it.

Mr. Pattie: I am not sure whether the hairdo is appropriate, although I realise that I am not in the best position to make jokes about that. We stand by the conviction of the institutions as to the importance of the offer. Among those institutions we hope that the NUM pension fund will be very important.

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): Has the Minister noticed that, on the day of this important announcement, the Liberal Benches are entirely empty, showing Liberal Members' lack of interest in the Government's programmes and policies? Is he aware that, in selling BT, the Government are turning a justifiable public monopoly into what Lord Weinstock described as an unjustifiable private monopoly? On foreign investment, is he aware that in selling off NTT over five years the Japanese have had the good sense to disallow foreign investment so as to ensure that high technology developments resulting from future developments in their telecommunications industry will remain firmly in Japanese hands and under Japanese control? Why have the British Government not shown the same wisdom?

Mr. Pattie: There is no reason why less than 14 per cent. foreign investment should mean that important new developments in advanced technology will go abroad. The company's interest will be substantially to maintain technological developments from excellent establishments such as Martlesham within the United Kingdom, so I see no need for the steps suggested by the hon. Lady.

Referring back to the important point about BT employees raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), I should make it clear that each employee can apply for 54 free shares now, worth just over £70, and receive two free shares for every share purchased, up to a maximum of 154 shares. That is a very important start.

Mr. Williams: Is the Minister aware that the new private corporation will be answerable to shareholders, most of whom will have too small a holding to be

significant, which is no substitute for accountability to the House, to Select Committees and to Ministers? He said that the corporation would have to satisfy the customers, but as a private monopoly it will have no need to do so. Indeed, the incentive to do so will be reduced because the corporation will not be answerable to the House and the voice of the consumer will be weaker in the new organisation.

Will the Minister now answer the important question that he has so far ignored about the overseas consortium intending to buy from within the United Kingdom tranche to the tune of nearly 100 million shares if it can get its hands on them? Is he aware of that consortium and is he concerned about it? Does he intend to take any action, or will overseas buyers be able to apply indiscriminately within the United Kingdom tranche in addition to the 450 million shares allocated for sale overseas?

On equipment purchases, will the Minister confirm that at present 95 per cent. of BT's equipment needs are met from within the United Kingdom and that £13 billion worth of orders per year are placed with British firms, keeping 70,000 jobs in more than 80 private companies? Is he aware that the chairman has said that as soon as BT is privatised he intends to place more orders with foreign factories?

Mr. Pattie: I will take those questions in reverse order. On the last point, I am not aware of the statement by the chairman Sir George Jefferson, to which the right hon. Gentleman refers. Naturally the chairman will wish the company to operate in the most commercially successful way possible. As I know from my many discussions with Sir George Jefferson, he does all that he can to support the British equipment industry and is prepared to lean as heavily as he can in that direction, but he will not be subjected to the clammy hand of Government direction, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) described it, compelling BT to make acquisitions from parts of British industry whose equipment may not be the most up to date. We wish to achieve greater efficiency and greater pressure from competitive power. Telling British industry that it can rely on BT orders for ever and a day does not help it to be more effective and competitive in world markets. British companies have the opportunity to tender and will obviously get the lion's share of BT equipment orders in years to come. We are simply letting in an element of competition, in the same way as the Ministry of Defence has done.

I am not aware of the overseas consortium to which the right hon. Gentleman refers. He will appreciate that I cannot comment publicly from the Dispatch Box at this stage about how share prices may move or who might want to purchase the shares. As the right hon. Gentleman well knows, however, there is a limit of 10 per cent. on all applications and that will be very closely scrutinised.

Mr. Williams: That has nothing to do with it.

Mr. Pattie: With respect, it has something to do with it because the overseas dealings will begin after applications have closed on the London stock exchange at 10 am on 28 November, when 14 per cent. or slightly less than that will be available for overseas investors.

Mr. Williams: So they can buy anything they like?

Mr. Pattie: I must continue, as the right hon. Gentleman made another important point. He seems not to appreciate that competition will be policed by Professor Carsberg, director-general of the Office of Telecommunications — DG-Oftel — who, through his advice to the Government on the Jove application for the joint value added network service between IBM and BT, has already shown that he takes the need for competition very seriously. That is the best safeguard that we can have.

Sheltered Accommodation

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.

11.29 am

Mr. Patten: Furthermore, this reflects in part the fact that they are relieved of some of the costs of living at home. I accept that the different arrangements applicable to long-stay patients and residents in old people's homes can be regarded as an anomaly. I think that I see my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South seeking to ask me to give way on that point.

Mr. Thorne: Will my hon. Friend please take into consideration the very unpleasant effect that constant bills have on the elderly? It is one problem for young people to receive them, but it is another when elderly people receive substantial bills. In this case, my constituent received a bill for her sister's accommodation for nearly £3,000. Every quarter yet another bill arrives, so the bill becomes greater quarter by quarter. She has already paid £6,000, so the most recent bill makes the total £9,000. She would like to know what happens when the entire value of the present accommodation is used up. Is that not an immoral way to proceed? Should we not be much more humane and let the sister carry on with her life without that millstone hanging round her neck?

Mr. Patten: I entirely appreciate my hon. Friend's concern for the welfare of his constituent and his constituent's sister. I shall bear in mind everything that he said. Perhaps my hon. Friend will be so good as to write to me with full details, including the bills that he mentioned this morning, so that as soon as possible I can go into the important points that he made on behalf of his constituent, with his characteristic care.

We have no plans to introduce "hotel charges" for NHS patients, or to abolish the 1948 provisions under which residents in local authority homes are required to contribute towards the cost of their accommodation. My hon. Friend also drew attention, in his most interesting speech, to the current arrangements for assessing what the contribution should be. We are open to new ideas. The current charging system is designed to reflect people's ability to contribute to the costs of their accommodation.

There has been concern that those charging arrangements need revision—my hon. Friend has been foremost in suggesting it—and particularly that they should be brought into line with the rules for paying supplementary benefit where, for example, capital of up to £3,000 is disregarded. Earlier this year we issued a consultative document setting out proposals for new revised arrangements. The response was not enthusiastic. Generally, our proposals were regarded as too complex. One of the points about consultation is getting such feedback. The arrangements were regarded as too complex, particularly those for calculating the notional income which should be assumed to derive from capital.

Since the proposals were issued we have, of course, started to review arrangements for supplementary benefits, as my hon. Friend will be aware. We have decided to delay further consideration of the whole range of issues that lie behind the points made by my hon. Friend until that review is complete. I assure my hon. Friend, however, that in taking our thinking forward we shall give careful consideration to the points that he made so lucidly.

Mobility Allowance

11.33 am

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): I am glad to have the opportunity of raising the case of Shelley and Russell Tulloch.

The case raises interesting topical questions concerning mobility allowances and who is eligible to qualify. Shelley and Russell are two constituents of mine who live in Melbourne, which recently won the best-kept village competition in Derbyshire. Shelley was born in December 1960, and therefore will soon be 24, and Russell was born in October 1962, and is now 22. When Shelley was three, it was clear that something was seriously wrong. She was diagnosed as suffering from a rare chromosomal abnormality. By that time, Russell had been born, and it was too late. That family now has two vigorous mentally handicapped adults in the household.

The main feature of the disability is mental handicap. It is slowly progressive, getting worse in the most tragic way. It is accompanied by mild motor problems, such as clumsiness. Russell also has petit mal and is treated with phenobarbitones and other drugs. However, it appears that his condition is not controlled, but is slowly getting worse. Indeed, the drugs seem to make his behaviour more unpredictable and make him less co-operative. Shelley does not have those problems, but she is much more aggressive than her brother and also occasionally suffers from deafness. The main difficulty with them both is behavioural problems, because they are unpredictable, and can be very noisy, aggressive and persistent. They tend to pester strangers and their activities may be unreliable.

I should like to quote from the original application by Mrs. Tulloch for the mobility allowance back in September 1982. It explains clearly what the family's problems are. Mrs. Tulloch said:

"I am applying for the Mobility Allowance on their behalf to help towards the cost of my own transport, which is a necessity to enable us to have any life outside the house, as I cannot cope with them alone on public transport for the following reasons:—

1. They are very outgoing by nature but can be aggressive towards me when restrained.

2. They can make a nuisance of themselves with other passengers by going to sit with strangers and chatting incessantly about nothing or asking personal questions. Some people don't mind, but others do, or are unable to cope with the situation.

3. They argue and fight with each other a lot which can be embarrassing, especially if they start swearing.

4. Public transport runs to time schedules, mentally handicapped people can be very stubborn when they want to and 5/10 minutes on your side makes a great deal of difference when you have appointments to keep. Public transport will not wait for you!

5. We live in a rural area and I travel 8 miles into the nearest town at least twice a week to take them to a Youth Club, as there are no facilities for them in our immediate area. If I went by bus we would have to walk about a ¼ mile from the nearest bus stop to the Club. On other evenings I take them to other places or just for a run somewhere to get them out. They don't like walking any distance, and their powers of concentration are poor, consequently they will not sit at anything for long, so I find through experience the best solution is to take them out. I also have regular hospital, dental and doctor's appointments to keep for both of them."

As part of the exercise for today's debate, I asked Mrs. Tulloch to make a note of the essential mileage that she did on behalf of those young people that was associated not with their attendance at the day centre, but with activities such as riding for the disabled, sports clubs,

swimming and attendance at a gateway club run by the local branch of Mencap. To her own astonishment, she realised that she was doing over 9,000 miles a year in her own car on behalf of the two young people. The result is a commendable quality of life. It is entirely right that I should pay tribute to Mr. and Mrs. Tulloch for the care, dignity, intelligence and good humour with which they have cared for those very disabled young people for more than 20 years, and with which they intend to go on caring for them.

We should also pay tribute to all the staff at the special school that the young people used to attend in my constituency and now at the Newhall adult training centre run by Derbyshire social services, and all the professional staff associated with Russell and Shelley, for the extraordinary way that they help the family to cope. I have no doubt from what I have seen elsewhere that without such attention and care both those young people would have been in institutions a long time ago.

The difficulties are recognised through the payment of attendance allowance for both young people and, of course, they both qualify for non-contributory invalidity pension. However, Mrs. Tulloch does not qualify for invalid care allowance, as she is a married woman. Whatever the difficulties of coping with one mentally handicapped person in the household, I am sure that the House will recognise that they are compounded by there being two.

The history of the application for mobility allowance starts more than two years ago. On 22 September 1982 the claim for mobility allowance for both young people was received and a medical examination was arranged. The examination was carried out on 29 December 1982 and refusal was recommended. On 18 February 1983, Mrs. Tulloch lodged an appeal. A further medical examination by the medical board took place on 8 June 1983 and it recommended acceptance and payment of mobility allowance for Shelley and Russell. There was jubilation in the Tulloch household when they were informed of the positive decision on 18 July. It is worth observing as an aside that it had taken nearly nine months from applying for to being granted. Although the allowance is backdated, the delay is typical and is much to be regretted.

The Secretary of State then decided to appeal to a medical appeal tribunal and the hearing was held on 22 September 1983. The Secretary of State's appeal was allowed and mobility allowance was refused. The family was notified on 2 November 1983. An appeal against a medical appeal tribunal's decision can be made only on a matter of law.

My involvement commenced soon after. Till June 1983, Mr. and Mrs. Tulloch had been the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost), who I know had been active on their behalf and had given them excellent advice. That it was excellent advice is shown by the fact that they had achieved mobility allowance. I first met them on 18 November 1983 and I wrote to the Secretary of State on 6 December. I know that the letter was received as it was acknowledged. Unfortunately, everything seemed to grind to a halt at that point. I wrote again on 29 February and again on 17 July 1984. I am not being awkward and I hope that I have not been nagging. I know that Ministers are deeply and genuinely concerned about the mentally handicapped. They have shown that in regard to many cases. However, I must ask whether it would be possible to have a reply to the correspondence that I have sent during the best part of what now amounts to one year.

Why did the DHSS appeal against the award when it had been granted after two medical examinations? Why did the Department not leave well alone? I think that part of the answer lies in the Secretary of State's observations to the second appeal, which goes to the heart of mobility allowance regulations and limitations. I should like to quote from it. Mobility allowance is payable under the Social Security Act 1975 to someone who is suffering from physical disablement to the extent that he is either unable to walk or virtually unable to do so. As to the virtual inability to walk, the Secretary of State observed:

"It is for the tribunal to decide how far ability is affected by impairment of balance, inco-ordination of movement, behavioural limitations, the need for guidance, supervision or support . . . In their statement of reasons for three decisions dated 4 January 1983 a Tribunal of Social Security Commissioners gave guidance on the relevance of assistance needed and behavioural factors in determining whether a person is unable or virtually unable to walk. The Commissioners decided that a person who is able to walk only with assistance (ie guidance, supervision or support) should not for that reason alone necessarily be found to be unable or virtually unable to walk. The Commissioners considered however that the need for such assistance was a facet of the manner in which a person could make progress on foot and should be taken into account by the adjudicating authorities . . . Similarly the Commissioners considered that behavioural limitations on a person's walking ability would also generally affect the manner, and possibly the speed, of his walking. They considered that if a person could be caused to move himself to a designated place only with the benefit of guidance and supervision and possibly after much cajoling the point may be reached at which the person may be found to be virtually unable to walk."

That view was clearly taken in the first appeal but not in the second.

This is the crux of the matter. There is no argument about these young people being able to put one foot in front of the other. If they were in the House, they could walk from one end to the other. They have some trouble with steps and may have difficulty if they are not familiar with the area. It also depends substantially on their mood whether they will budge at all. That is not the problem. The more important fact is that they cannot go far without supervision. They cannot use public transport alone—they would be in some danger if they did and they would certainly be a nuisance to other passengers. They require constant care, guidance and control and without help they are just as housebound as if they were physically handicapped.

I am aware that many cases are under review. One is currently under discussion in another place. The entire issue of disability is under review. That effort by right hon. and hon. Members is to be welcomed. The question is whether mentally handicapped people are disabled. I say that they are, as they cannot travel independently. I believe that we should change the mobility allowance rules and allow them to claim.

Mobility allowance has been one of the most successful of all recent benefits. More than 300,000 people currently claim the comparatively modest sum of just over £18 a week and about 10 per cent. have commuted the money to enable them to buy a vehicle. Since 1979, there has been a more than 100 per cent. increase in the benefit in cash terms. There is no doubt that the Government have made every effort to be generous to disabled people. However, the regulations are restrictive and out of date. They were old-fashioned when they were proposed, in that they did

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

not take account of mentally handicapped people who are now living in the community in greater numbers. If we are to make headway in caring for such people in the community and if we are to give reasonable support to such families and parents, we should grant applications such as this.

Tragically, sooner or later, this family will have to give up caring for these disabled people at home. Shelley and Russell's conditions are getting worse and their parents are getting no younger. However, it will happen later by many years rather than sooner if appropriate help is given. It is the DHSS's view, which is well stated in many policy documents, that it is cheaper and better to care for people at home. That has been at the heart of DHSS policy for many years. I therefore urge my hon. Friend to consider these matters sympathetically.

11.46 am

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) for raising this sad case today. I am glad that she has had an opportunity to do so. She will realise that, in view of the way in which she has, with her customary initiative, seized the opportunity at fairly short notice, I have not been able to refresh my mind on the details of the case to the extent that I would normally wish before replying. She deserves the admiration of her constituents for the way in which she has pursued the case and for raising it today. Constituents who have such an assiduous Member of Parliament pursuing their interests are indeed lucky.

The debate enables me warmly to join in my hon. Friend's tribute to Mr. and Mrs. Tulloch for their devoted work in bringing up Shelley and Russell. Their work must command the admiration of us all. Having experienced the problems that mental handicap can bring, though not in my immediate family, I appreciate what devotion must have been required from Mr. and Mrs. Tulloch. I have listened with great sympathy to what my hon. Friend has said. I shall study her speech with care and look into the delay in responding to her letters. I shall ensure that we are in touch with her as soon as possible.

I endorse what my hon. Friend said about the importance of mobility allowance and about the emphasis that the Government have put on it and confirm the figures that she gave. Mobility allowance is now received by about 340,000 claimants, at a cost of about £360 million a year. The Government's commitment to the benefit is reflected in the fact that it will have been virtually doubled by the uprating in a week's time, when it will reach £20 a week. It is an important benefit in the network of benefits available to disabled people.

At a tangent to the main thrust of my hon. Friend's argument, I noted her reference to the delays that take place in processing mobility allowance claims. It is an inescapable fact that if a claim goes to appeal, whatever its route, it is likely to experience longer delays than an ordinary, straightforward claim. Given that the numbers of claims for the benefit have been rising rapidly—the Government welcome that—and that their assessment depends on the use of scarce medical manpower, the difficulties are clear.

My hon. Friend knows that it was as a result of our general concern about the delays occurring to mobility allowance claims that my predecessor as Minister for the Disabled, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), commissioned a report by a retired civil servant, Peter Oglesby. The report made a number of recommendations, including ways to speed up the administration of mobility allowance claims. The Government have acted on a significant number of those recommendations, although some remain under consideration.

As a result, the past two years have shown a significant speeding up of the processing of mobility allowance claims. I pay tribute to the work of our officials at North Fylde central office in Norcross, who have put great effort into improving the way in which claims are handled. We are doing everything we can to reduce those delays and to keep them to a minimum, and we have already had considerable success.

I now turn to specific issues connected with the case of Mr. and Mrs. Tulloch and of Shelley and Russell. In view of the age of Shelley and Russell, any claim for mobility allowance is technically a claim by them. For anyone over 16, the claim and payment of the benefit is to the individual concerned rather than to his parents. Perhaps that shows how difficult it would be to follow my hon. Friend's suggestion and consider some mobility allowance claims together and some circumstances as a whole. The benefit is paid to individuals and claimed by individuals. If one attempted to consider some claims together, it would be difficult to decide which individuals should be lumped together for the purposes of a claim. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept the considerable difficulties which her suggestion would create.

My hon. Friend implied that in the adjudication on such a benefit it should be possible to consider circumstances such as the availability of public transport and other factors affecting the environment of claimants. I have heard that argument before. At first one reacts sympathetically to it, but when one considers it seriously it is difficult to see how one could make differentiations equitably in the payment of this or other social security benefits according to geographical location. To give an obvious and crude example, it would be absurd if a person who happened to live in north London was refused mobility allowance because he was on a bus route and consequently moved to a remote village in Essex to qualify because he was no longer on a bus route. I hope that my hon. Friend accepts the difficulties inherent in such differentiation.

The major thrust of my hon. Friend's remarks related to the position of mentally handicapped people under the mobility allowance scheme. As she said, there has recently been difficulty in interpreting the regulations for mentally handicapped people and for other categories of potential or aspiring claimants. They include blind people, whose needs were the subject which last brought me to my feet in the House this week, and of deaf-blind people.

There are obvious difficulties and disadvantages in specifying particular types of disability as automatically qualifying for benefits designed to reduce the consequences of disability. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that many mentally handicapped people would not qualify for mobility allowance. I have visited the large mentally handicapped hospital in my constituency on a number of occasions. Many people there have no difficulty in walking and making their way about, although they are mentally handicapped. However, I accept that certain conditions and degrees of mental handicap can cause real

difficulties in that direction. I merely seek to establish that one cannot sensibly say that mental handicap alone, without regard to its degree, extent or consequences, should be taken as an automatic passport to the payment of mobility allowance.

Recently, the process of determining the interpretation of the mobility allowance rules has given rise to considerable discussion among adjudication authorities —this will soon reach even higher levels—about how the regulations should be applied to the mentally handicapped, the blind, the deaf-blind and other categories. As my hon. Friend said, a tribunal of social security commissioners dealt with claims from three mentally handicapped children in an effort to clarify the interpretation of the legislation for people who needed assistance to move around. The decision was reported as R(M)1/83. In their decision, the commissioners held that the need for guidance, supervision and support was a facet of the manner in which a person could make progress on foot and therefore should be considered by independent adjudicating authorities in deciding claims, but that it was not in itself conclusive.

Earlier this year, the Court of Appeal gave judgment in the case R(M)1/84, which involved a blind person who had directional problems. In that case, the question of guidance, supervision and support was a relevant factor. The claimant was unsuccessful, but the extent to which the judgment affects the conclusions reached in R(M)1/83 is arguable. Case law is therefore in an unsatisfactory state, but we hope that that will be resolved, as the case reported in R(M)1/84 is now on appeal before the House of Lords in its judicial capacity. The hearing is due on 7 March 1985 according to my latest information. I am sorry that that is still some time ahead. When we have the results, we shall consider the need for further guidance and, if necessary, we shall amend the regulations in the light of it. I can make no promises about what we might think it appropriate to do in the light of the outcome, but we are conscious of the difficulties in interpreting the regulations in cases such as those of Shelley and Russell Tulloch. Although I cannot hold out an immediate hope of a dramatic change, I hope that I have said enough to show that we are worried about the problem and that we wish the position to be more clear.

I cannot say much more to my hon. Friend today. We are genuinely and deeply sympathetic to the problems that she described, and I am glad to know that the Tullochs are receiving substantial support from the social security system in the form of attendance allowances in both cases and non-contributory invalidity pensions, which will shortly become severe disablement allowances, in both cases. That reflects Ministers' anxiety — certainly my anxiety as a social security Minister with responsibility for the disabled — to ensure that support is available to families in such circumstances. I can say nothing more about the specific mobility allowances in this case, but I shall be in touch with my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Tranquillisers

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I am grateful to the Minister for giving me the opportunity of raising this matter at such short notice. I wish to bring to the attention of the House a fairly well known and widely canvassed problem that is developing steadily with regard to the use of benzodiazepine drugs, which are more commonly known as tranquillisers. There are 10 or 12 drugs in that generic group, and I noticed from the statement of the Secretary of State the other day that many of the branded drugs that were taken off the prescription list will in future be obtained only privately and will be replaced in the National Health Service by substitute drugs. I welcome the use of generic substitutes, but I draw to the Government's attention the fact that the problem of addiction will be just as great.

In reply to questions from me on 9 November, the Minister for Health said that in 1980 23·9 million prescriptions were issued for drugs within the group. To make clear what I am talking about, the group includes drugs such as Valium, Librium, Anxon, Ativan, Frisium, Halciom, Mogadon, Normison, Serenia-D and Transene. In 1981, the figure rose to 24·2 million; in 1982 it was 24·4 million; and for the first nine months of 1983— one accepts that it takes time to collate the figures— there were 17·7 million prescriptions. We cannot say how many drugs are issued with each prescription, but at a conservative estimate we are talking about more than 100,000 capsules in only nine months.

I accept that there are clinical needs for what might be called anti-depressants, but I do not accept that the present method of prescribing them is always in the best interests of the patients. I do not challenge the clinical judgment of doctors, but I shall draw to the attention of the House some of the effects of prescription policy. It has been estimated by Professor Malcolm Lader, who is the professor at the Institute of Psychiatry and who has carried out research into this matter at Maudsley hospital in London for about five years, that there are about 100,000 tranquilliser addicts or dependants. He considers that to be a conservative estimate, and that the real figure is nearer 250,000.

Why has that happened? Dependency upon those drugs causes many side effects such as agoraphobia, nausea, a loss of the sleep pattern, an effect on one's ability to enjoy life and a general state of depression. Indeed, some of the researchers explained that the side effects are often such that they constitute a need for further drugs of the same generic structure.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): My hon. Friend welcomed the change to generic drugs. Is there not a danger that the problem may be aggravated where a medical practitioner is subjected to pressure by his patient to prescribe the branded drug, because the patient has become convinced that the generic substitute, although technically the same, does not alleviate the problem that the patient believes exists? The problems could increase in the coming years as more people reject the generic substitutes because they have convinced themselves that those drugs will not deal effectively with their problems.

Mr. Bermingham: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I hope that we convince the Government that there

[Mr. Bermingham]

is need for action, for further research and for more self-help groups to wean people off the drugs. We also need a revision in medical practice to avoid the problems to which my hon. Friend refers. I welcome the introduction of generic substitutes, but even they will give rise to addiction and dependency.

We have all heard of the "smartie" syndrome. One visits the local practitioner and says to him, "I am feeling a bit off." The doctor is often rushed—I accept that that happens—and gives the patient a prescription for a pick-me-up, which may be Valium, Librium or any of the other benzodiazepine drugs.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. John Patten): I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but Valium does not pick one up; it puts one down.

Mr. Bermingham: I accept the Minister's comment, but the point is that the drugs are designed to get rid of depression. A few weeks later the patient returns to the doctor and his symptoms have not changed. Sometimes he will not even see the doctor, but will pick up a repeat prescription from the receptionist. That is not good medical practice. *Women's Own* magazine, which conducted a large-scale survey on the matter, showed that there were cases of people being prescribed such drugs for as long as 18 years. Who needs medication for 18 years, or even for four years? There are clear signs that an addiction problem has grown.

I hope that the Government will begin to fund research into the problem and self-help groups. The Minister for Health said recently, in reply to my question, that about £10,000 is spent on self-help groups. That is nowhere near enough. We must do four things: first, stop repeat prescriptions; secondly, enable doctors to have time clinically to treat their patients; thirdly, be on our guard to prevent people being given drugs for long periods; and, fourthly, fund massive research to alleviate the problem.

11.59 am

Mr. John Patten: I welcome the contribution made by the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) to this debate, raised at short notice. I shall write to him on all the points that he has raised.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at 12 noon.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 7 November 1984

TRANSPORT

Severn Crossing

Mr. Raffan asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received the outstanding consultants' reports on the Severn crossing; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Copies of the reports listed below have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. They provide the expected confirmation of the general extent and type of strengthening necessary for the crossing to cope with future traffic loading.

(1) Independent Appraisal of the Wye Bridge and Viaduct and the Beachley Viaduct—by Husband & Co.

This confirms the earlier findings of the Flint & Neill Partnership (published in May 1983) about the strengthening work that will be necessary.

(2) Appraisal of Aust viaduct—by Husband & Co.

This updates the appraisal which Husband & Co. carried out in May 1983 as a sub-contract for the Flint & Neill Partnership.

(3) Independent assessment of the Aust viaduct—by the Flint & Neill Partnership.

This is the check of Husband & Co's appraisal (item (2) above). The two firms are generally agreed on the work that is necessary.

(4) Report on the risk of ship collision with the piers of the Severn crossing—by the Flint & Neill Partnership and Husband & Co.

The consultants conclude that it is only necessary to investigate protective measures for the piers of the Aust viaduct. The risk to the piers of the Wye bridge will be the subject of a separate report.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Bus Lanes

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been in the latest 12 months for which figures are available for driving in bus lanes in the Metropolitan Police area.

Mr. Mellor: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that 4,100 prosecutions were brought against motorists in 1981 for driving in bus lanes and 3,500 in 1982; the corresponding figure for 1983 is not available.

ENVIRONMENT

Green Belt

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for the Enviroment when he will make an announcement about his decisions on the transfer of the Greater London Council's interests in land under the Green Belt (London and Home Counties) Act 1938.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I have placed a paper in the Library of the House today.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Outgoers' Scheme

Mr. Andy Stewart asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will be in a position to invite more milk producers to commit themselves to joining the outgoers' scheme.

Mr. MacGregor: In England and Wales 4,826 applicants originally expressed interest in becoming outgoers and at the beginning of last month we invited 2,747 of the smaller producers to commit themselves to the scheme. We expected however that a considerable number might, in the event, decide not to go out of production after all and this has in fact proved to be the case. We are therefore now able to invite a further group of about 380 applicants to take the place of those who have dropped out.

The original group comprised those with quota of up to 200,000 litres and if all had accepted this would have amounted to 278·8 million litres of quota released. The second group now being invited to join comprises those between 200,000 and 250,000 litres, amounting to a further 94·2 million litres. As before, a small number are being excluded because milk is only a relatively small part of their overall farming enterprise.

In the light of the response we receive we shall send out further invitations as necessary to replace any producers who drop out.

The original target of buying up 289 million litres of quota in England and Wales was more than four times oversubscribed. Even though a significant number of producers may drop out, I have no reason to believe that the target will not be met.

EMPLOYMENT

Information Technology Centres

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on information technology centres.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The first information technology centres were established just over three years ago. There are now more than 150 ITeCs in operation and it is planned to extend the total number of centres to 175. ITeCs have made a substantial contribution to training under the youth training scheme. They also provide an invaluable source of expertise in new technology and have the potential to play a wider role in the provision of training and related services in their localities. The changes which are now being made, and which are set out below, will help to encourage ITeCs to widen their activities in this way.

ITeCs are currently jointly funded by the Manpower Services Commission, the Department of Trade and Industry and individual scheme sponsors. For training carried by ITeCs under the youth training scheme, the commission funds trainee allowances and makes a substantial contribution to adult staff salaries, operating costs and capital costs. In addition, the Department of Trade and Industry makes available pump-priming funds over the first three years of each centre's existence to assist with capital purchases, software development and the payment of salaries sufficient to recruit and retain the necessary specialist adult staff.

It has been the intention from the start of ITeC programme that by the end of the first three yeas of operation each centre should be in a position to operate without further funding from the Department of Trade and Industry. Some centres coming to the end of their third year are not yet in that position. I am asking centres to move to it as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, I have agreed that the commission should provide any necessary additional adult staff salary support as a temporary measure for the period until 31 October 1985.

In addition, arrangements are being made to allow ITeCs to retain a proportion of any income which they generate as a contribution towards the cost of the replacement of capital equipment. Arrangements are also being made to allow ITeCs to use a further proportion of their revenues as a contribution towards salaries of adult staff from 1 November 1985. I am also examining certain technical rules which inhibit ITeCs from extending the range of their activities. Relaxation of such rules should significantly increase the potential of ITeCs to generate income.

Taken together, these changes should consolidate and increase the role of ITeCs in their localities and thus enhance our efforts to accelerate training in new technology.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

El Salvador

Mr. Madel asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for United Kingdom policy towards El Salvador of the talks initiated by President Duarte with the FMLN/FDR guerrilas.

Mr. Renton: We welcome President Duarte's initiative, which is in line with his commitment to strengthen democracy, and to work for national reconciliation and an improvement in human rights in El Salvador. To demonstrate our support for these policies we have offered to resume a modest technical assistance programme and have made available £100,000 for emergency civilian supplies under our aid programme. Outside the aid programme we have also offered places for one or two suitably qualified Salvadorean military officers at staff college courses in Britain.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 8 November 1984

ENVIRONMENT

National Park Authorities (Maps)

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the preparation of maps of moor and heath by national park authorities under section 43 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Mr. Waldegrave: National park authorities are required by section 43 of the Act to prepare and publish maps showing those areas of moor and heath within the parks which in their opinion it is particularly important to conserve. Responsibility for this work rests with the authorities concerned. However, on 30 July 1981, at column 1202, during the passage of the Bill my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) explained that we should expect the Countryside Commission to be consulted on the preparation of each map. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Wales and I have therefore invited the commission to advise us on the manner in which section 43 is being implemented.

WALES

Redundancies (Clwyd)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many redundancies have been declared in the county of Clwyd since May 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I am informed by the Manpower Services Commission that between January 1981 and September 1984, 8,838 notified redundancies occurred in Clwyd. Information at the local level for the period prior to January 1981 is not available on a comprehensive basis.

Job Creation

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of new jobs expected to be created over the next 12 months in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* in the county of Clwyd.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Available information relates to the number of manufacturing jobs expected to arise over the next three to four years from projects for which offers of selective financial assistance have been accepted and from Government factory allocations. For Wales the latest figure available as at June 1984 was 20,530. That for Clwyd was 4,300.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Mercury Communications

Mr. Hayward asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when a copy of the Telecommunications licence granted to Mercury Communications will be made available.

Mr. Pattie: A copy of the Mercury licence has today been placed in the Library together with the order designating Mercury's systems as public telecommunications systems. Copies are available from the Vote Office.

Trade Mark Office

Mr. Dykes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will report on Her Majesty's Government's efforts to secure the proposed European Community trade mark office for London; and if the information gathered by the Community Trade Mark Office Committee concerning a possible location for this institution might be of use to his Department in promoting these efforts.

Mr. Pattie: The Government emphasise their firm desire that the Community trade marks office should be located in London. They have repeatedly made their position clear to their Community partners in the past and will negotiate on the matter as soon as the opportunity arises within the appropriate Community bodies. This will depend on the progress made towards reaching agreement on the Community trade mark system as a whole. Parliamentary approval will be sought at an appropriate time for any financial support offered to secure the location of the office in London.

On the second part of the question, the Government are most appreciative of the exploratory work carried out by the Community Trade Mark Office Committee, which will be most helpful. The selection of the particular location in London, to be proposed to our Community partners, will, of course, be the responsibility of the Government, but it will be made only after considering all reasonable possibilities.

SCOTLAND

Forestry Commission

Mr. Lord asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will make a statement on the Forestry Commission's disposals programme to date.

Mr. Younger: My right hon. Friends and I have been reviewing the disposals programme in the light of proposals made to us by the Forestry Commission.

When we asked the commission to undertake this programme we stated that its main purpose was to reduce the commission's call on public funds for the management of its forestry enterprise, and some £56 million have been raised to date from the sale of assets. Recently, however, the commission has initiated major changes to its structure with a view to improving its efficiency and reshaping its management to meet future needs. Related to this, it has also reviewed its land holdings to identify those properties that are not essential to the enterprise and which might be sold as part of the rationalisation of its estate. Bearing in mind that not all such properties will find a ready market, the commission has estimated that a programme on this

basis could yield some £45 million over the next four or five years. This would mean total receipts from sales from the start of the programme in 1981 of around £100 million.

Against this background, the Government have decided that the commission's disposals programme should be extended to 31 March 1989 and that its main purpose should be the rationalisation of the estate with a view to improving the commission's efficiency and the commercial effectiveness of the forestry enterprise. The commission can now plan ahead on this basis without the uncertainty and attendant difficulties that frequent reviews can cause in achieving a coherent approach to the management of the enterprise.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Viral Hepatitis

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress has been made towards implementing the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council's recommendation to extend the occupational cover for viral hepatitis.

Mr. Newton: I am pleased to announce that regulations were laid on 1 November which should benefit more people who have contracted viral hepatitis. They take effect on 3 December 1984. Employed earners who have worked in any occupation involving contact with human blood or human blood products, or who have been in contact with a source of viral hepatitis, will be covered by the regulations. Cover was previously restricted to employed earners who worked in any occupation involving close and frequent contact with human blood or human blood products, or close and frequent contact with a source of viral hepatitis infection by reason of employment in the medical treatment or nursing of a person or persons suffering from viral hepatitis or in a service ancillary to such treatment or nursing.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 9 November 1984

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Students (Grants)

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any detailed figures of the number of students on minimum grant who do not receive the full parental contribution.

Mr. Brooke: This information is not collected by the Department.

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received advocating the abolition of the student minimum grant.

Mr. Brooke: None.

Under-fives

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of the population aged three years or over but under five years was receiving full or part-time education at the beginning of the present school year; and how this compares with each of the last five years.

Mr. Dunn: Information for the current school year is not yet available. The percentage of children aged three and four years of age receiving full-time or part-time education in maintained schools in England in the years 1979 to 1984 were:

January	*per cent.*
1979	37
1980	37
1981	38
1982	38
1983	38
1984	40

The figures above are the numbers of pupils in schools aged three and four years at the preceding August expressed as a percentage of the total number of three and four-year-olds in the population. The figures exclude children who were four years old at the preceding August but who became five before the census day in the following January.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will list the outstanding Select Committee reports which await debate on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Biffen: There are no Select Committee reports awaiting debate for which I have undertaken to find time. As the hon. Member knows, such reports are not necessarily debated.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Family Courts

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Attorney-General if he will make available the further details of the study on family courts being undertaken by the Lord Chancellor's Department referred to in Cmnd. 9298, page 12; by whom the study is being conducted; and when a final report is expected.

The Attorney-General: An announcement about the family court review was issued in July. A copy has been placed in the Library. The study is being undertaken jointly by officials of the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Home Office with the following terms of reference:

"To examine the feasibility of the establishement of a unified court for the exclusive exercise of jurisdiction in family and domestic matters below the level of the Court of Appeal, to identify the main options for such a court and to assess the resource implications for such a court and to assess the resource implications of each of these options."

It is not yet possible to give a date for the publication of a final report.

Family Courts Conciliation Service (Bristol)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Attorney-General whether Her Majesty's Government have come to a decision as to further funding of the Bristol family courts conciliation service.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor will continue to provide funding for the Bristol courts family conciliation service until the end of the current financial year. Any decision about further funding will be taken in the light of advice given to the Lord Chancellor by the conciliation project unit which the Government intends to set up to monitor the costs and effectiveness of conciliation services.

WALES

Unemployment

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the level of unemployment in Holyhead; and if he will list the areas in Wales which have higher levels of unemployment.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I remind my hon. Friend that information of this sort is now available in the House of Commons Library.

Unoccupied Homes

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many homes remain unoccupied in Wales; what steps he is taking to remedy the situation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Local authorities' housing investment programme returns indicate that about 50,000 dwellings in all sectors were empty in Wales at April 1984.

The Welsh Office is closely involved in the exercise mentioned by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment in his answer of 30 October 1984, at columns 936-37. We will be giving careful consideration to what further action is needed in Wales in the light of the outcome.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if any members of the Forestry Commission's management structure review group, which reported in April 1982, or its headquarters and conservancy review group, which reported in January in the current year, visited the proposed site for the amalgamation of the Forestry Commission's Welsh Conservancy offices at Aberystwyth prior to any decisions to amalgamate.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: No members of either group visited Aberystwyth during the two reviews. However, both groups had members who were familiar with the situation at Aberystwyth, and the views put forward by commission staff stationed in Wales were also taken fully into account by the groups before recommendations were made.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his future practice to make available in the Library minutes of Forestry Commission meetings.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: These are internal meetings at which, among other things, the forestry commissioners discuss and formulate advice to forestry Ministers on policy matters. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for copies of the minutes of commission meetings to be placed in the Library of the House.

Education

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will express as a percentage of those pupils in full-time education aged 16 years or under yet eligible to leave at the end of the last academic year in Wales, the number who *(a)* left school, *(b)* entered Government employment and training schemes, *(c)* found other employment and *(d)* remain wholly unemployed; and if he will also give the information by county in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information is not available in the form requested. An analysis of the distribution of young people reaching minimum school leaving age is carried out on a yearly basis. The information in respect of 1984 will be available in spring 1985.

SCOTLAND

Teachers (Salaries and Conditions of Service)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will respond to the request of the Educational Institute of Scotland, and other representative bodies, for an unrestricted independent review body on teachers' salaries and other related matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has recently met representatives of the teachers and of the employing authorities to discuss the request for an independent review of Scottish teachers' salaries. He hopes to be in a position to announce a decision shortly, taking account of these discussions and of the other representations that have been submitted to him.

Health Boards (Tenders)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the number and names of the health boards which have not yet taken effective steps to secure competitive tenders for all the ancillary services provided in the hospitals under the jurisdiction of each health board; and what steps he proposes to take on this matter.

Mr. John MacKay: Five health boards—Argyll and Clyde, Fife, Greater Glasgow, Highland and Lothian—have resolved, for the time being, not to seek competitive tenders to test the efficiency of their support services, but to secure improvements in cost-effectiveness by carrying out, with the full co-operation of their staff, intensive reviews of services. I am meeting health board chairmen on 13 November to discuss the next steps to be taken.

Nursery Places

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of nursery places provided by education authorities per 1,000 head of population in the region for the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The following table shows the number of children attending education authority nursery schools and classes for the years from September 1979 to September 1983 per 1,000 head of three and four year old populations.

Pupil rate per 1,000

Authority	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Borders	129·7	137·0	173·8	176·0	166·0
Central	218·2	255·7	289·0	295·2	315·3
Dumfries/Galloway	74·6	84·7	80·3	81·3	79·1
Fife	367·3	388·3	396·9	415·1	426·6
Grampian	180·4	187·4	196·0	184·0	187·7
Highland	85·1	84·2	103·4	108·2	103·5
Lothian	368·5	405·9	432·7	434·8	440·0
Strathclyde	233·0	248·8	277·7	280·1	278·8
Tayside	210·0	225·4	239·1	239·6	233·9
Orkney	210·5	213·7	177·4	167·3	181·1
Shetland	116·5	132·2	120·5	120·7	111·9
Western Isles	169·5	184·3	195·1	196·7	163·2
ALL SCOTLAND	239·8	258·1	279·8	281·5	282·6

Child Abuse

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the number of cases of child abuse reported in each region in Scotland for the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. John MacKay: This information is not collected centrally. Each region maintains its own record of child abuse cases reported.

Borders Regional Authority

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the share of rates paid in the Borders regional authority by *(a)* domestic ratepayers and *(b)* non-domestic ratepayers for each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Ancram: The shares of rateable values attributable to—and hence of rates paid by—domestic and various other classes of ratepayer in the Borders region and its constituent districts may be obtained from part I, section 2, of "Rating Review", published by the Scottish

branch of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and available in the House Library. The most recent edition is that of June 1984.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of total local authority revenue expenditure in the Borders regional authority was financed by *(a)* rate income and *(b)* Exchequer grant for the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Ancram: The table sets out the information based on budget information published in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy publication "Rating Review".

per cent.

	Rateborne Expenditure	*Exchequer Grant*
1980-81	27·3	72·3
1981-82	29·8	71·3
1982-83	30·7	71·1
1983-84	26·9	71·3
1984-85	28·8	68·5

Notes:
1. For the purpose of this question, revenue expenditure is relevant expenditure for rate support grant purposes, including loan charges.
2. Exchequer grant is specific revenue grants, and needs and resources elements of rate support grants. It excludes domestic element, which is a payment in lieu of rate income.
3. Rateborne expenditure and Exchequer grant percentages do not add up to 100 per cent. because of the creation of balances or their use to finance expenditure.

Microelectronics in Education

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is satisfied with progress being made by the committee set up to co-ordinate all aspects of microelectronics in education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: At my right hon. Friend's invitation, the Scottish Council for Educational Technology established in November 1983 a widely representative microelectronics in education committee —MEC—with a broad remit to co-ordinate all aspects of microelectronics in education and using the previously existing Scottish microelectronics development programme as its executive arm. I am satisfied that MEC has made good progress in its work and is playing a major part in achieving an integrated Scottish approach in this very important field.

Scottish Ambulance Service

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional resources he has made available to the Scottish ambulance service to meet the increased demand brought about by the expansion of day care services.

Mr. John MacKay: It is for the Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service to decide on the disposition of the resources made available to it for the ambulance service. Funds provided for the recurrent expenditure of the Scottish ambulance service doubled from £11·3 million in 1978-79 to £22·6 million (provisional) in 1983-84: expenditure for the current financial year is estimated to be about £23·6 million. I am aware that the Scottish ambulance service gives a high priority to the needs of day hospitals when considering the use to be made of development funds.

Teachers (Pay)

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will appoint an independent body to review the level of teachers' salaries and to make recommendations to Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has recently met representatives of the teachers and of the employing authorities to discuss the request for an independent review of Scottish teachers' salaries. He hopes to be in a position to announce a decision shortly, taking account of these discussions and of the other representations that have been submitted to him.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Kilbrandon Inquiry (Recommendations)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to carry out the recommendations of the Kilbrandon inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I have noted with interest the publication on 1 November of the report of the independent inquiry under Lord Kilbrandon. The report is one of a number of interesting documents which have been published in recent months representing different views and outlooks. I welcome the concern expressed in all these documents to find a way forward for Northern Ireland. This can only be achieved if any proposals which are made are practical and likely to be broadly acceptable to all those committed to constitutional and peaceful progress. The proposals in the Kilbrandon report and in other published documents need to be seen against this background as talks continue between those involved in Northern Ireland in the period ahead.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he intends to set up an inquiry on his Department's responses to the famine in Ethiopia and the lessons learnt by his Department in handling the crisis.

Mr. Raison: I see no need for an inquiry. The Department has responded most efficiently to the demands placed on it. But there are always lessons to be learnt.

Mr. George asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department is currently doing to assist the relief of famine in Ethiopia; and if he is satisfied with the current programmes.

Mr. Raison: Over £3 million of the £5 million I announced recently has now been allotted to help expand the feeding efforts of the voluntary agencies, to strengthen the Ethiopian transport fleet, and to reinforce the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Our 6,500 tonnes food aid should be shipped within a fortnight. The

problems are very great, but together with substantial new aid we have just agreed in the European Community I believe this will make a real impact on the crisis.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will list the amount of aid given to Ethiopia over each of the past five years, distinguishing between food aid and money aid.

Mr. Raison: The figures for aid to the Ethiopian Government are as follows:

£'000

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Food aid	1,021	1,091	22	5,194	2,510
Other aid*	1,742	478	144	106	527
TOTAL	2,763	1,569	166	5,300	3,037

* This includes development loans and grants, disaster relief and technical co-operation, but excludes aid channelled through the European Community, the World Food Programme and other multilateral agencies.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he will take to assist Ethiopia over the next year.

Mr. Raison: Our first task must be to spend to best effect the £5 million already allotted to Ethiopia and other drought-stricken African countries, and the £35 million supplementary aid now decided upon by the European Community of which we pay about a fifth. This will take us well into next year. I shall then review what more we might do.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the amount of aid given to Ethiopia from the contingency fund.

Mr. Raison: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced to the House on 24 October, £5 million has been allocated from the aid programme contingency reserve for Ethiopia and other African countries affected by the drought and famine. The bulk of this will be spent on Ethiopia. In addition, £1·4 million has been allocated to the purchase and transport costs of food aid for Ethiopia; and the United Kingdom's share of the allocations from the European Community budget for additional food and other emergency aid will be attributed to the aid programme. The United Kingdom's share in relation to Ethiopia is some £2 million, but it is not yet known how much of this will be spent this financial year.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will state the conditions tied to aid given to Ethiopia over the last five years.

Mr. Raison: Nearly all aid given or promised to Ethiopia during the last five years has been humanitarian or food aid. Part of the food aid is channelled through the World Food Programme. This has not carried any conditions imposed at our instance. Our recent agreement to forgive future repayments due on past aid loans is unconditional. Technical co-operation provided or promised is, as usual, tied to British sources. Aid by the European Community, to which we have subscribed our share, has been given in accordance with the Lomé convention and the Community's regulations governing food aid and disaster or emergency assistance.

Nicaragua

Mr. Holland asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, following the general election in Nicaragua, he will enter into negotiations with its Government for a renewal and increase in the British aid programme to that country.

Mr. Raison: The British bilateral aid programme to Nicaragua is limited to the provision of a small number of scholarships in the United Kingdom, support for small development projects co-financed with British voluntary agencies, and for Nicaraguan refugees and displaced persons through contributions to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Her Majesty's Government have no plans at present to increase this level of assistance.

Aid Budget

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the items in the aid budget which have been reduced in order to increase the amount of aid given to Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: The measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 24 October will be met from the aid programme's contingency reserve which exists to deal with just such situations. Existing commitments will not be affected.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the level of the contingency fund within the aid budget at the beginning of the financial year and at present.

Mr. Raison: It is not the practice to reveal the contingency element within the aid budget, for reasons indicated in the reply to the first report from the Foreign Affairs Committee (1983-84)—Cmnd. 9367, page 8.

Famine Relief

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to respond to possible famines in areas other than Ethiopia over the next year.

Mr. Raison: The UN agencies concerned are predicting that many countries, particularly in Africa, will need emergency food aid in 1985. I urged my European Community colleagues on 6 November to give priority in the 1985 EC food aid programme to meeting these needs, and we shall do the same in our own bilateral food aid programme. The EC also has some £65 million from the emergency provision in the European development fund to draw on in 1985, and there is a contingency provision within our own aid programme for allocation as required.

UNESCO

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy concerning United Kingdom membership of UNESCO.

Mr. Raison: I am currently reviewing British policy towards UNESCO with my colleagues in the light of developments in the organisation this year.

IMF (Annual Meeting)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why, at the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund, the proposal of the World Bank to set up a special fund to help deal with the problems facing people in sub-Saharan Africa was opposed by Her Majesty's Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: The World Bank made no such proposal. Its management is currently seeking general reactions to its diagnosis of the problems and prescriptions for change in sub-Saharan Africa, and will be meeting officials from my Department later this month.

International Development Association

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to increase the funding of the International Development Association; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: Although we indicated our willingness to subscribe to supplementary funding for the general resources of IDA, no such scheme is now being pursued. A further opportunity may occur when donors formally review IDA's resources next year.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Company Profitability

Mr. Jim Spicer asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the recent trend in company profitability.

Mr. Peter Rees: Latest estimates show that the real rate of return to non-North sea industrial and commercial companies has risen from 3·4 per cent. in 1981 to 5·8 per cent. in 1983—the best return since the peak of the previous profitability cycle in 1978. For all industrial and commercial companies, including those operating in the North sea, the rate of return increased from 6·5 per cent. in 1981 to 10 per cent. in 1983. Profits have continued to increase in 1984, suggesting that the upward trend is continuing.

Third World Countries (Assistance)

Mr. Wareing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he will be making to the meeting of the World Bank's development committee to be held early in 1985 aimed at assisting the poorest Third world countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It has been agreed that the development committee and the interim committee will give special attention to a range of international financial issues of particular concern to developing countries in the spring of 1985. The precise terms of the agenda and other arrangements have not yet been settled, but my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer intends to play a constructive part in the discussions.

Developing Countries (Lever Report)

Mr. Wareing asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of the recommendations of the Lever report on the debt problems of developing countries he finds acceptable; what plans he has to act on the report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I support the Lever report's concern about sustaining non-inflationary financial flows to developing countries, particularly by means of direct investment. I expect my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to discuss these issues at the special sessions of the interim and development committees next spring.

Civil Service

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the present size of the Civil Service; by how many the establishment has been reduced since April 1979; and what categories of staff have suffered the biggest reductions.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Corbett asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the amount of value added tax paid since 1 May to the latest convenient date in respect of hot food and drink purchased from take-aways.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Government Departments (Long-term Planning)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what expansion in individual Government Departments occurred in the manpower engaged in long-term planning after the abolition of the Central Policy Review staff.

Mr. Hayhoe: The information is not available centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

Unemployed Persons

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Prime Minister what information she possesses from the 1981 census of Britain of the number and percentage of unemployed in Britain by social class.

The Prime Minister: The information requested is as follows.

The census includes as "out of employment" those persons who—in the week before the census—were either seeking work, prevented from seeking work by temporary sickness, or waiting to take up a job already accepted. The social classification used in the census is based on the occupation of those persons in employment and on the previous occupation of those out of employment. The economically active include both those in employment and those out of employment.

Social class as defined for census tabulation	*Economically active*	*Out of employment*	*Percentage of those out of employment who were in each social class*	*Percentage* in social class who were out of employment*
All persons age 16 and over	25,405,590	2,489,400	100	9·8
I. Professional, etc. occupations	948,660	24,050	1	2·5
II. Intermediate occupations	5,313,790	176,210	7·1	3·3
III. (N) Skilled occupations	5,554,870	245,120	9·8	4·4
III. (M) Skilled occupations—manual	6,173,040	596,400	24·0	9·7
Partly skilled occupations	4,582,690	440,570	17·7	9·6
Unskilled occupations	1,613,340	244,180	9·8	15·1
Inadequately described, never previously occupied or previously employed in the armed forces	1,219,200	762,870	30·6	62·6

* Percentage of the economically active.

Government Services (Post Office Corporation)

Mr. Spearing asked the Prime Minister how far, and in what way, the convenience and cost to the citizen is taken into account when considering the most cost effective way of delivering Government services which could be provided by the counter services of the Post Office Corporation.

The Prime Minister: These factors are among a number which are taken fully into account.

"London Gazette" (Honours)

Mr. Leighton asked the Prime Minister if she will provide the *London Gazette* publication dates of the announcements of lists of major United Kingdom Civil Division honours, other than New Year's and Birthday honours, since 1964.

The Prime Minister: The information is as follows:

Resignation lists
27 November 1964
4 August 1970
2 April 1974
1 June 1976
12 June 1979

Dissolution lists
13 May 1966
5 December 1974
21 July 1983

Others
3 July 1969 (The Investiture of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales)
8 October 1982 (South Atlantic)

There are numerous other honours awarded in the Civil Division but these relate often to only a few individuals at a time. Examples are those in the Victorian Order conferred by Her Majesty, honours conferred on Governors General and the Lord Mayors of London.

There are also regular lists of gallantry awards and imperial service medals.

Housing Expenditure

Mr. Winnick asked the Prime Minister what representations she has received in the past two weeks regarding any reduction in public expenditure on housing for the forthcoming financial year.

The Prime Minister: I have received about 15 such representations in the past two weeks.

Council of Europe

Mr. Eggar asked the Prime Minister what changes have been made in the composition of the United Kingdom delegation to the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe.

The Prime Minister: I have made the following appointments:

Representatives

I have appointed the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Johnston) in place of the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross).

Substitutes

I have appointed my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Sir Biggs-Davison) in place of my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell), and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) in place of the Lord McNair.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement as to the costs to date in policing the National Union of Mineworkers' dispute in Leicestershire.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Leicestershire police calculate that the additional cost of policing the miners' dispute in the county up to 25 August, the latest date for which information is available, was about £9·045 million.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much money is to be provided to Leicestershire police committee, and when, to enable payment to the other local authorities which provided police during the current National Union of Mineworkers' dispute;

(2) if he will provide details of the amounts to be contributed towards the costs of policing the current mining dispute to date *(a)* in Leicestershire and *(b)* in the remaining areas of the east midlands.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend announced on 9 October that no police authority would have to bear from the rates as a result of the miners' dispute more than the product of 0·75 penny rate. In Leicestershire this is £882,000 and the costs falling on the police authority have already reached this level. All remaining approved additional costs will be met by the Government. The authority has sought and received advances of police

grant and of the special payment which he is making totalling £7·479 million to meet, among other costs, the costs of police authorities whose forces have provided assistance to the Leicestershire police. The contribution which other police authorities in the east midlands will receive from the Government towards their expenditure resulting from the dispute in their own area will depend on the amount of that expenditure. For example, in Nottinghamshire the Government are meeting all approved additional costs over £958,000.

Remand System

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of state for the Home Department what plans he has to change the remand system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend intends to seek power in the Prosecution of Offences Bill to apply time limits to the preliminary stages of criminal proceedings. These would have the effect of restricting the period for which an accused may be remanded in custody. He would exercise this power only after considering the results of field trials held to test the feasibility and practical implications of particular time limits.

Hare Coursing

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation for the purpose of outlawing hare coursing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: None. The Government regard this as a matter for individual conscience and decision.

Firearms Act 1968

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure, in his proposed revised memorandum of guidance to the police on the administration of the Firearms Act 1968, that all holders of firearms certificates for the use of rifles for vermin control will not be in breach of condition if they test fire their rifles where their use for vermin control is permitted.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We are still considering the advice to be provided on this subject in the revised memorandum.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, following its incorporation into the 1973 Green Paper "The Control of Firearms in Great Britain" (Cmnd. 5297) and the recent report of the working party on the administration of the Firearms Act 1968, dated April 1984, he will make available in the Library Sir John McKay's working party report of 1972 into the administration of the Firearms Act 1968.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. The report on Sir John McKay's working party was an internal one.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the administration of the Firearms Act 1968 by chiefs of police; and if he proposes to initiate legislative reforms with a view to making cost savings and standardising procedures.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We have no plans to introduce such legislation.

Nursing Homes (Prosecutions)

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought against private residential nursing homes in the past 12 months by public, professional or governmental bodies; and how this compares with the previous 12 months.

Mr. Mellor: I shall reply as soon as possible.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authorities (Capital Receipts)

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total amount of capital receipts which local authorities have been required not to spend as a result of his announcement of 18 July.

Mr. Waldegrave: On 18 July, my right hon. Friend asked local authorities to exercise restraint in their capital expenditure in 1984-85. The effect on capital receipts accumulated in previous years cannot be deduced from information held centrally. Under the terms of the request, local authorities remain free to spend up to the level of their capital allocations, plus the prescribed proportion of capital receipts in the year, or to the level of their contractual commitments on 18 July, whichever is the higher.

Town and Country Planning Act 1971

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to review section 169 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971.

Mr. Macfarlane: The section is already under review.

Access to the Countryside

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will detail the bodies concerned with access to the countryside which are currently in receipt of a grant from his Department; if he will state each grant being paid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Apart from the Department's grant-in-aid to the Countryside Commission, which gives financial support to certain bodies concerned with access to the countryside, some of the grants awarded by the Department under its special grant programme go to voluntary bodies with similar concerns. In the current year these are as follows:

Organisation	*Amount of Grant* £
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	100,000
Byways and Bridleways Trust	4,000
Conservation Trust	8,250
Council for National Parks	7,620
Inter-Action—Country Wings	20,810
Kennet and Avon Canal Trust	5,000
Open Spaces Society	4,500
Royal Society for Nature Conservation	41,135
Rural Preservation Association	11,536

Housing (Expenditure)

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now make a statement on the Government's intention regarding public expenditure on housing for the forthcoming financial year.

Mr. Gow: A statement will be made shortly.

Rates

Mr. Gary Waller asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his forthcoming announcement on a general domestic rating revaluation will be accompanied by the consultation document referred to in the White Paper "Rates", Cmnd. 9008.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I ask my hon. Friend to await the announcement.

Housing

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes exist with outside water closets only.

Sir George Young: The most recent estimate available appears in table 1 of the "English House Condition Survey 1981, Part 1", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the annual change in public expenditure on housing in each of the past five years in *(a)* current prices and *(b)* constant prices.

Sir George Young: Details of public expenditure on housing for each year since 1978-79, in both cash and cost terms, are set out in the public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9143) in table 2.7 and table 1.14, respectively.

Council Properties (Sales)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the amount of capital receipts from the sales of property in each of the past three years by local authorities; and what proportion has been spent on housing.

Mr. Waldegrave: Following is the available information:

Local Authority Capital Receipts from Sales of Fixed Assets—all services—England

	£ million
1981-82	998
1982-83	1,592
1983-84	1,548

Source: Local authority capital payments returns. Information on how these receipts have been used is not available.

TRANSPORT

Marine Pilots

Mr. Mudd asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he will make a statement on the draft final report on the early retirement proposals for United Kingdom marine pilots.

Mr. David Mitchell: I hope it will be possible to make a statement fairly soon.

Mr. Mudd asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has completed the consultation with the main interested parties following the publication of the Samuel Montagu report on the early retirement of marine pilots published in April 1984.

Mr. David Mitchell: Yes. I am giving careful consideration to the options that are open.

Driving Licences (Loss)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will change the prevailing 10-year rule so that licence holders who mislay their driving licence do not have to resit their driving test if they cannot prove they have held one during the last 10 years.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is under consideration. If a change is feasible, it will be made when a convenient legislative opportunity occurs.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Montgomery asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current state of negotiations between the United Kingdom and French Departments of Transport over the Channel tunnel project.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend will be meeting the French Minister of Transport next week to consider what the next steps for the two Governments should be if financing proposals meeting the conditions set out in the Secretary of State's statement of 22 May are submitted by potential promoting groups.

Midland Link Motorways

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of investigations on the parapet rails of the elevated sections of Midland link motorways.

Mr. Michael Spicer: We have undertaken the investigations into the effects of waterborne de-icing salts on the concrete elements of the parapet. We are now satisfied that we can put in hand the parapet rail repairs and work is proceeding.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the final cost of the bearing replacement work on the Bromford viaduct of the Midland link motorways; and how this compares with the estimate.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Although work on the final contract for the replacement of the bearing plinths is complete, we do not yet have the contractor's final account. My Department has been advised that the estimated final contract cost is £818,000 but this may be varied and I am still awaiting further information from my agents, West Midlands county council, from whom I require a full financial statement. This matter is being pursued vigorously by my Department. The tender sum was £509,793.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the effectiveness of the replacement bearings on the elevated sections of the Midland link motorways; and how this is measured.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No bearings have been replaced. We have replaced bearing plinths on the elevated sections

of the midland links and they are, and will continue to be, subject to regular inspections. The effectiveness of the replaced plinths will be judged on their durability. So far there is no evidence of any of the defects which affected the previous plinths.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the effectiveness of the new grouts used on the bearing plinths of the elevated sections of Midland link motorways; and how this is measured.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The new grouts are subject to regular inspections, and their effectiveness will be judged on their durability. So far there is no evidence of any of the defects which affected the previous grouts.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the contracts let for work on the plinths and bearings on the elevated sections of Midland link motorways.

Mr. Michael Spicer: There have been no contracts for bearing replacement. The following contracts have been let for work on plinths:

Viaduct	*Contract*	*Contractor*	*Completed*
Titford	A	Kinmain Construction Ltd.	March 1980
	B	DABB Chemicals Ltd.	24 January 1982
Oldbury	A and B	R. M. Douglas	19 January 1981
	E	Conrads	21 December 1978
	F	Conrads	10 December 1978
	G	Conrads	4 April 1979
Wigmore		DABB Chemicals Ltd.	24 January 1982
Ray Hall	A	Percy Bilton	28 April 1978
	B	Wrekin	5 December 1978
	C	Wrekin	29 June 1979
	D	Conrads	25 May 1979
	E	Advanced Sealants Ltd.	20 February 1981
Bescot	C	Conrads	17 September 1978
	D	Wrekin	10 January 1979
	E	Wrekin	14 March 1979
	F	Percy Bilton	9 March 1979
	G	Percy Bilton	14 October 1978
Queslett		Advanced Sealants Ltd.	January 1980
Thornbridge		DABB Chemicals Ltd.	6 November 1981
Witton		DABB Chemicals Ltd.	24 November 1980
Gravelly Hill		R. M. Douglas	21 March 1982
Bromford	A1	Wrekin	17 March 1983
	B	Wrekin	22 March 1983
	C	Lilley Construction Ltd.	2 August 1984

Airports (Expansion)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to encourage the expansion of Manchester international airport and other airports outside the south-east region.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made on 26 October, at columns 982-86, arising from the Adjournment debate raised by my hon. Friend the member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), in which I explained the ways in which this Government have encouraged, and will continue to encourage, the development of regional airports, and in particular Manchester international airport.

Bus Policy

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of the total public stage-carriage bus mileage in England and Wales is represented by the bus mileage encompassed in the experiments in Hereford and Worcester, on which he has based his recommendations for changes to bus licensing, deregulation and competition policies; and if he is satisfied with the breadth of this experimentation as a basis for change.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is not correct to say that our recommended changes to bus licensing, deregulation and competition policies are based upon the trial area in Hereford and Worcester, which accounts for some 0·15 per cent. of stage carriage bus mileage in England and Wales.

EMPLOYMENT

Trade Unions (Closed Shop)

Mr. Colvin asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many trades unions have held ballots, as provided for under section 3 of the Employment Act 1982, to confirm or otherwise the continuance of closed shops in places of employment where they represent employees.

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many ballots on the continuance of closed shop arrangements have been held since 1982; and with what results

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There is no requirement in the Employment Act 1982 to notify this Department of any secret ballots which are held to determine whether closed shops have the support of the employees they cover. Of those ballots reported in the press, the results of three, covering a total of 2,731 employees, have been against continuance of the closed shop, and two, covering a total of 446 employees, in favour.

Manufacturing and Service Industries (Report)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Employment what action he proposes to take on the manufacturing and service industries 1983 report of the Health and Safety Inspectorate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The manufacturing and service industries 1983 report records activity during the year by Her Majesty's factory inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive. It also sets out some of the inspectorate's current concerns and priorities.

In 1984 the inspectorate has continued its programme of assessment-based pre-emptive inspections to all sizes and types of premises. It has also undertaken targeted initiatives, either in respect of problems in particular industries or of widespread hazards, such as the effects of excessive noise and the failure to wear head protection in construction. It has continued its reactive work by investigating accidents and complaints and by giving advice.

I am satisfied that the inspectorate continues to allocate its resources on the basis of evaluation of competing priorities. It is the responsibility of all employers to see that their employees and the public are not put at risk by work activities; the duty of suppliers of articles and substances to see that these are safe; and it is for work people to co-operate in measures to prevent accidents and injury to health.

"Training for Jobs"

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will write to the Manpower Services Commission stating whether his letter of 17 September about the implementation of "Training for Jobs" was a directive under the Employment and Training Act 1973.

Mr. Tom King: No. My letter to Manpower Services Commissioners of 17 September was a specific request that the commission's corporate plan for the period 1985-88 would need to include plans for the expenditure of the additional resources for non-advanced further education made available to the commission as announced in the White Paper "Training for Jobs" (Cmd. 9135).

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what was the status of his letter to the Manpower Services Commission of 17 September containing the implementation of "Training for Jobs".

Mr. Tom King: My letter to Manpower Services Commissioners of 17 September was a specific request that the commission's corporate plan for the period 1985-88 would need to include plans for the expenditure of the additional resources for non-advanced further education made available to the commission as announced in the White Paper "Training for Jobs" (Cmnd. 9135).

Young Workers Scheme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the current numbers of participants on the young workers scheme at the different levels of subsidy to their employers.

Mr. Alan Clark: Under the current young workers scheme, the payment to employers for jobs which qualify for support is £15 per week. The payment for jobs which were accepted for support before 1 April 1984, when the rules of the scheme were changed, is either £15 or £7·50 a week, depending upon the level of the young person's gross weekly earnings. On 28 September, the latest date for which information is available, 70,000 jobs were supported. A detailed breakdown could be provided only at disproportionate cost, but it is estimated that about 7 per cent. are at the lower level of support.

Training and Employment

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the current, future, projected and previous numbers of participants in total and by region in the various training and employment measures run by the Manpower Services Commission.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Community Programme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) to what extent the recent rule changes in the community programme will have the effect of maximising the impact of the scheme on the number of registered long-term unemployed rather than any long-term unemployment as such;

(2) what assessments he made of the effect of the recent rule changes in the community programme on unemployed women before their introduction;

(3) what reductions there were to the number of people eligible for the community programme as a result of recent rule changes.

Mr. Peter Morrison: As my right hon. Friend explained in his statement on 30 July, at columns 121-22, the recent changes to the community programme were intended to improve the prospects of resettling long-term unemployed people into regular jobs, help sponsors in the management of projects and ensure that places on the programme go to those most in need. They were introduced after careful assessment of their effects on both men and women and should improve the programme's use of taxpayers' money.

The number who will be affected by the decision to give priority to those people who meet the programme's criteria for long-term unemployment and are also benefit recipients will vary according to changing personal and family circumstances. We have provided that where benefit is claimed by a head of household and includes an element of payment for an unemployed spouse, that spouse will be regarded as a benefit recipient. As a result, some non-claimants and some included in the monthly count of the unemployed because they claim national insurance credits but not benefits will remain eligible for the programme, providing the other conditions for participation are also met.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of women employed on the Manpower Services Commission community programme; what percentage of the current total community programme work force are women; and, of those, how many were in receipt of benefit before joining the scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in Merseyside he envisages will be affected by the proposed change in the eligibility conditions for the Government's community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: No changes in eligibility criteria for the community programme are currently proposed following those announced by my right hon. Friend in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder) on 30 July, at columns *121-22*, and introduced from 1 October.

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in Merseyside are presently covered by Her Majesty's Government's community programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: On 31 October 1984, 5,476 people were employed on the community programme in Merseyside. Merseyside residents may also travel to work on community programme projects mounted outside the area.

Information Technology Centres

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take the opportunity of International Youth Year to extend the Manpower Services Commission's information technology centres programme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Our original pilot information technology centre programme launched in 1981 was intended to fund 20 centres. The programme has been so successful that we have now established over 150 centres, and our current plans are to expand the programme to 175 centres.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment which Manpower Services Commission information technology centres currently receive topping up grants from the Department of Trade and Industry, listed by name and region.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Those information technology centres currently in receipt of funding from the Department of Trade and Industry are as follows:

London Region (14)
- Brent
- Brixton
- Camden
- Covent Garden
- Croydon
- Docklands
- Greenwich
- Hackney
- Haringey
- Hounslow
- Islington
- Lewisham
- Southall
- Southwark (Microtech)

Midlands (25)
- Aston (Birmingham)
- Bedworth
- Boston and South Holland
- Burton-on-Trent
- Cannock
- Corby
- Derby
- Dudley
- East Lindsay
- Grantham
- Hanley (Stoke)
- Leicester
- Lincoln
- Mansfield
- Newcastle under Lyme
- Northampton
- North Leicestershire
- Nottingham
- Rugby
- Sandwell
- Solihull
- Stafford
- Walsall
- Wolverhampton
- Worcester

Northern (9)
- Aycliffe
- Cleveland
- Cramlington
- Durham
- Gateshead
- Hebburn
- North Tyneside
- Peterlee
- Sunderland

North West (24)
- Barrow
- Blackburn
- Blackpool (Fylde Coast)
- Bolton
- Burnley
- Bury
- Halton
- Knowsley
- Lancaster
- Manchester (6502)
- Manchester (ORT)
- Oldham
- Preston
- Rochdale
- Salford
- Sefton
- South Liverpool
- Southport
- St. Helens
- Tameside
- Warrington
- West Cumbria
- West Lancashire (Skelmersdale)
- Wigan

Scotland (19)
- Aberdeen
- Bellshill
- Bridgeton
- Clydebank
- Cranhill
- Cumbernauld
- Dumfries
- Dundee
- East Kilbride
- Edinburgh City
- Falkirk
- Glenrothes
- Govan
- Inverness (Highland)
- Irvine
- Levernouth (East Fife)
- Stirling
- West Fife
- West Lothian

South East (25)
- Ashford
- Basildon
- Bracknell
- Brighton
- Cambridge
- Crawley
- Gravesham
- Guildford
- Harlow
- Hastings
- Ipswich
- Isle of Wight
- Maidstone
- Medway
- Milton Keynes
- Norwich
- Peterborough
- Portsmouth
- Reading
- Rochford (South East Essex)
- Slough
- Southampton
- South East Surry
- Staines
- Stevenage

South West (11)
- Bath
- Bristol (St. Anne's)
- Christchurch
- Cornwall
- Dartington
- Exeter
- Gloucester
- North Bristol
- Plymouth
- Swindon
- Taunton

Wales (10)
- Caernarfon
- Cardiff
- Clwyd (Kelsterton)
- East Dyfed (Llanelli)
- Ebbw Vale
- Neath
- Newport

Treforest (Pontypridd)
Vale of Clwyd
Wrexham

Yorkshire and Humberside (12)
Barnsley
Bradford
Grimsby
Halifax
Harehills (Leeds)
Hull
Kirklees
Scunthorpe
Sheffield
Shipley
South Leeds
York

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people are currently receiving training in information technology centres which get top up grants from the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: At the end of September 1984 some 4,770 young people were being trained in information technology centres which are currently in receipt of funding from the Department of Trade and Industry. All these centres, of course, also receive substantial funding from the Manpower Services Commission for training provided under the youth training scheme.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he has consulted the information technology centres on their views on the impending withdrawal of topping up grants.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Information technology centre sponsors and managers have been advised from the outset that the funding from the Department of Trade and Industry was for pump-priming purposes for a limited period only. As, however, I announced in my reply of 7 November 1984, at columns 2-3, to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), I have agreed that the Manpower Services Commission should provide any necessary additional salary support for centres' specialist adult staff for the period until 31 October 1985 for those centres whose funding from the Department of Trade and Industry comes to an end. This, of course, is additional to the normal funding which the commission make to centres for training provided under the youth training scheme.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to ensure that the information technology centres receive sufficient funds to continue their role as training grounds for new technology.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 7 November 1984, at columns 2-3, to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale).

Labour Statistics

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of women unemployed for more than 12 months; and what percentage of those unemployed for over 12 months are women.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information about the number of unemployed females claiming benefit is in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of those women unemployed for 12 months or more, are in receipt of either unemployment, supplementary, sickness or invalidity benefit.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information in the precise form requested is not available. The available information comes from the 1983 labour force survey which estimates that in the second quarter of 1983 some 360,000 women in Great Britain had been looking for work for 12 months or more, of whom 210,000—about 60 per cent.—were claiming either unemployment benefit, supplementary allowance as an unemployed person, or national insurance credits.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the number of women who are unemployed but not registered as such.

Mr. Alan Clark: The labour force survey estimates that in the second quarter of 1983, the latest date for which estimates are available, some 540,000 women in Great Britain were seeking work but were not claiming unemployment benefits. This figure, however, includes some 100,000 women who were students or on Government training schemes and who would not be described as unemployed. The survey also showed that an estimated 320,000 women included in the claimant count were not actively seeking work in the previous week.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Limited Partnerships (Research and Development)

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what studies the Government are making to review the law governing limited partnership with a view to facilitating the system for the financing of research and development projects.

Mr. Fletcher: None. If my hon. Friend has suggestions as to how the Limited Partnerships Act 1907 could be amended to facilitate the financing of research and development projects, I would be happy to study them.

Trading Discounts

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects the review of trading discounts allowed retailers by manufacturers to be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: The Director General of Fair Trading is undertaking a fact finding exercise aimed at updating some of the statistical information in the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on discounts to retailers. He is unlikely to be in a position to publish the full results of this exercise until well into next year.

Coles Cranes, Sunderland

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will seek an assurance from the Kidde Corporation that it will continue primary crane manufacture as well as assembly at Coles Cranes in Sunderland;

(2) if he will seek an assurance from the Kidde Corporation that Coles Cranes will continue to compete in all its existing international markets and, in particular, in Australia, India and the far east;

(3) if he will seek an assurance from the Kidde Corporation that it will continue mobile crane research and development at Coles Cranes in Sunderland.

Mr. Fletcher: I have received assurances from the Grove division of Kidde Corporation that Grove intends to continue the manufacture of cranes in Sunderland and to develop Coles' operations in world markets.

Privatisation (Fees)

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list what advisory or consultancy fees have been arranged with companies advising his Department on aspects of the privatisation of Jaguar Cars and British Telecom.

Mr. Pattie: No. It is not the practice to disclose the value of individual contracts between the Department and its consultants and advisers.

Liquidations and Bankruptcies

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the most recent available figures on company liquidations and personal bankruptcies.

Mr. Fletcher: Monthly figures up to September were published in *British Business*, 19 October, and further detail in the quarterly article on 26 October. Table 2 of the latter article gives the division of bankruptcies between the self-employed and other individuals.

Information Technology Centres

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to change the current arrangements for support to information technology centres from his Department.

Mr. Fletcher: My right hon. Friend has no plans to change the current arrangements for support to information technology centres from my Department. A total of 175 ITeCs will receive pump-priming grants totalling £75,000 over their first three years from the Department.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current level of support to information technology centres; how this has changed over the last three years; and what further changes are projected in the level of support.

Mr. Fletcher: The Department provides a pump-priming grant of £75,000 to each ITeC over its first three years. Initially, the Department had agreed to provide pump-priming grants of £55,000 per ITeC over their first two years, but in 1983 the Department agreed a further third year's grant of £20,000 to facilitate open access. No further changes are projected in the level of DTI support for ITeCs.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the information technology centres by name, location and current number of trainees which receive financial support from his Department.

Mr. Fletcher: The following list contains a total of 167 ITeCs which have been approved for funding by the Department to date. Eight ITeCs have already received the full DTI grant of £75,000, 149 are currently receiving that grant, and a further 10 will be receiving DTI grants over the next three years. In addition, a further eight ITeC locations have yet to be approved for departmental funding to bring the total number to 175. Indicated on the list is the number of approved training places for those centres. I understand that the current number of trainees in place is available from the Department of Employment.

ITeC	*Location*	*Training places*
Aberdeen	Broad Street, Aberdeen A89 1NX	30
Ashford	Brunswick Road, Ashford TN23 2TX	30
Aston (Birmingham)	Rocky Lane, Aston, Birmingham	35
Austin Rover (Birmingham)	Longbridge, Birmingham B31 2JB	30
Aycliffe	Menom Road, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham	50
Barnsley	Pontefract Road, Barnsley ST1 1AJ	35
Barrow	Abbey Road, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria	40
Basildon	Burnt Mills Road, Basildon, SS13 1DQ	30
Basingstoke	Basingstoke, Hants	30
Bath	Lower Bristol Road, Bath, Avon	30
Bedworth	Hosiery Street, Bedworth, Warwickshire	40
Bellshill	Bellshill, Lanarkshire ML4 3JA	40
Birmingham (Tyseley)	Tyseley, Birmingham	30
Blackburn	Philiips Road, Blackburn, Lancashire	45
Blackpool (Fylde Coast)	Boothley Road, Blackpool, Lancashire	30
Bolton	Elton Street, Bolton, Lancashire	40
Borders	Melrose, Borders	20
Boston and South Holland	Boston, Lancashire LN1 1YL	50
Bracknell	Skimped Hill Lane, Bracknell RG12 1JX	35
Bradford	Charles Street, Bradford, North Yorkshire	60
Brent	Stonebridge Centre, London NW10 ORG	30
Bridgeton (GEAR)	Templeton Street, Glasgow G40 1DW	30
Brighton	New England Street, Brighton, BN1 4GH	40
Bristol (New Work)	Woodland Way, Kingswood, Bristol BS15	35
Bristol (St. Annes)	St. Anne's Road, Bristol BS4 4AB	40

ITeC	Location	Training places
Brixton	39 Brixton Road, London SW9 6DZ	30
Burnley	Enpismore Street, Burnley BB10 3EU	30
Burton-on-Trent	2 Derby Street, Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire	30
Bury	Limefield Brow, Bury, Lancashire	40
Caenarfon	Llanberis Road, Caernarfon, Gwynedd	30
Cambridge	Gwydir Street, Cambridge CB2	30
Camden	7 Leighton Place, London NW5 2QL	40
Cannock	New Pendridge Road, Cannock, Staffordshire	30
Cardiff	East Canal Walk, Cardiff CF1 5QQ	30
Carlisle	Carlisle, Cumbria	30
Charles Wootton	8 Myrtle Parade, Liverpool, Merseyside	40
Christchurch	Grange Road, Christchurch, Dorset	30
Cleveland	34 Albert Road, Middlesbrough, Cleveland	30
Clydebank	2 North Avenue, Clydebank G81 2DR	30
Clwyd (Kelsterton)	Kelsterton Road, Flint, Clwyd	30
Corby	Market Square, Corby, Northants	30
Cornwall	Daniell Road, Truro, Cornwall	30
Covent Garden	Odhams Walk, Long Acre, London WC2	35
Coventry	Greyfriars Lane, Coventry CV1 2GZ	40
Cramlington	Nelson Road, Cramlington NE23 9BL	30
Cranhill	21 Gellrock Crescent, Glasgow G33 3HJ	30
Crawley	Maxwell Way, Crawley RH10 2SF	30
Croydon	Croydon, Surrey	30
Cumbernauld	18 Forth Walk, Cumbernauld, Glasgow	30
Dartington	Old Postern, Dartington, Totnes, Devon	40
Derby	Normenton Road, Derby DE1! 2GP	30
Derwentside	Consett, County Durham	30
Docklands	11 Indescon Court, London E14 9TJ	30
Dudley	Moor Street, Brierley Hill, West Midland	35
Dumfries	Catherinefield, Dumfries DG1 3PQ	30
Dundee	17 King Street, Dundee DD1 2LD	30
Durham	Bowburn, Durham DH6 5AD	30
East Dyfed (Llanelli)	100 Trostre Road, Llanelli, Dyfed	30
East Kilbride	30 Hawbank Road, East Kilbride G74 5EX	30
East Lindsey	Manby Park, Louth LN11 8UP	30
Ebbw Vale	Tafarnauback Industrial Estate, Tredegar, Gwent	30
Edinburgh	27 York Place, Edinburgh EH1 3HP	30
Exeter	Exeter, Devon	30
Falkirk	Grangemouth Road, Falkirk FK2 9AD	30
Gateshead	St. James Road, Gateshead NE8 3EQ	40
Gloucester	Larkhay Road, Gloucester GL3 3NT	30
Glenrothes	Flemington Road, Glenrothes, Fife	30
Govan	Holmfauld Road, Linthouse, Glasgow G15 4RY	30
Grantham	Isaac Newton Way, Grantham NG31 9RT	30
Gravesham	102 London Road, Gravesend DA11 9NS	30
Greenwich	Macbean Street, London SE18 6LW	30
Grimsby	Riby Street, Grimsby, South Humberside	30
Guildford	Bedford Road, Guildford, Surrey	40
Hackney	5 French Place, London E1 6JB	20
Halifax	315 Gibbet Street, Halifax, West Yorkshire	30
Halton	Waterloo Road, Widnes, Cheshire	30
Hanley (Stoke)	Regent Road, Hanley, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire	30
Harehills (Leeds)	161 Harehills Lane, Leeds LS8 3QE	30
Haringey	Roslyn Road, London N15 5EU	50
Harlow	Hobtoe Road, Harlow, Essex CM20 1TH	30
Hastings	18 Theaklen Drive, St. Leonards, East Sussex	30
Hebburn	Ellison Street, Hebburn, Tyne and Wear	45
Hounslow	London Road, Isleworth, Middlesex	30
Hull	82 Goulton Street, Kingston upon Hull	60
Inverclyde	5 East Blackhall Street, Greenock, Renfrewshire	40
Inverness (Highland)	13a Harbour Road, Inverness IV1 1SY	30
Ipswich	Argyle Street, Ipswich, Suffolk	30
Irvine	12 MacAdam Place, Irvine KA11 4HP	30
Isle of Wight	Hurstake Road, Newport, Isle of Wight	30
Islington	49 Old Street, London EC1V 9HX	30
Kirklees	2 Oldgate, Huddersfield HD1 6QW	30
Knowsley	Charly Wood Road, Kirkby, Liverpool	50
Lancaster	St. Leonards Gate, Lancaster LA1 1NN	30

ITeC	*Location*	*Training places*
Leicester	26 Chancery Street, Leicester LE1 5WO	30
Levonmouth (East Fife)	Banbeath, Leven, Fife	30
Lewisham	18 Creekside, London SE8	30
Lincoln	Dean Road, Lincoln LN2 4JZ	40
Liverpool (Merseyside Training)	6 Salisbury Street, Liverpool, Merseyside	36
Maidstone	1 Bower Terrace, Maidstone, Kent	50
Manchester (6502)	2 Southcombe Walk, Manchester M15 5NW	30
Manchester (ORT)	Higher Openshaw, Manchester M11 1FL	30
Mansfield	Thoresby Street, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire	30
Medway	Khyber Road, Chatham ME4 4TT	40
Milton Keynes	5 Erica Road, Milton Keynes MK12 6HS	30
Neath	Canal Side, Neath, West Glamorgan	40
Newcastle	White Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE6 3PJ	30
Newcastle-under-Lyme	1a King Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme	30
Newport	Corporation Road, Newport, Gwent	30
Nottingham	51 Glasshouse Street, Nottingham NG1 3LP	30
Northampton	21 Hazelwood Road, Northampton NN1 1LG	40
North Bristol	Olvaston Road, Horfield, Bristol	35
North Leicestershire	1a Granby Street, Loughborough, Leicestershire	30
North Tyneside (Brass Tacks)	Norham Road, North Shields, Tyne and Wear	30
North Westminster	Woodfield Road, London W9	30
Norwich	10 Blackfriars Street, Norwich NR3 1SF	30
Oldham	Orme Mill, Waterhead, Oldham OL4 3JA	40
Peterborough (PITeC Ltd.)	Park Crescent, Peterborough PE1 4BG	30
Peterlee	Neville Road, Peterlee, County Durham	35
Portsmouth	Guildhall Square, Portsmouth PO1 2Al	45
Plymouth	Constaintine Street, Plymouth PL4 8DE	30
Preston	Watery Lane, Preston, Lancashire	50
Reading	Abbey Square, Reading RG1 3BE	30
Rochdale	55 Drake Street, Rochdale, Lancashire	40
Rochford (South East Essex)	Main Road, Hockley, Essex	30
Rugby	Railway Terrace, Rugby, Warwickshire	36
St. Helens	Waterloo Street, St. Helens, Merseyside	50
Salford	50 University Road, Salford, Manchester	40
Sandwell	Tildasley Street, West Bromwich	30
Scunthorpe	Doncaster Road, Scunthorpe DN15 7DS	50
Sefton	Hawthorne Road, Bootle, Merseyside	50
Sheffield	Thomas Street, Sheffield S1 4LE	30
Shipley	Otley Road, Shipley, West Yorkshire	30
Slough	5 Colndale Road, Slough, Berkshire	35
Southport	Eastbank Street, Southport, Merseyside	50
Solihull	2245 Coventry Road, Sheldon, Birmingham	40
Southall	Bridge Road, Southall UB2 4BD	40
Southampton	19 Duke Street, Southampton SO1 1ES	30
South East Surrey	Church Road, Nutfield, Surrey	40
South Leeds	38 Sweet Street, Leeds LS11 9AJ	60
South Liverpool	Netherley, Liverpool, Merseyside	50
Southwark (Microtech)	194 Union Street, London SE1 0LH	40
Stafford	Castle Street, Stafford ST16 2EF	30
Staines	Short Lane, Stanwell, Middlesex	40
Stevenage	6 Hills Way, Stevenage SG2 0QA	30
Stirling	Stirling University, Stirling, FL9 4LA	30
Sunderland	North Hylton Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear	30
Swansea	250 Carmarthen Road, Swansea, West Glamorgan	30
Swindon	Dean Street, Swindon, Wiltshire	30
Tameside	48 Union Street, Hyde, Cheshire	30
Taunton	Wellington Road, Taunton TA1 5AX	30
Telford	14 Halesfield, Telford, Shropshire	75
Treforest (Pontypridd)	Treforest Industrial Estate, Pontypridd, Mid Glamorgan	40
Vale of Clwyd	Fanol Avenue, Abergele, Clwyd	50
Walsall	Willenhall Road, Darlaston, West Midlands	35
Waltham Forest	Chestnuts House, 398 Hoe Street, Walthamstow	30
Warrington	Barbauld Street, Warrington, WA1 2QY	30
West Cumbria	Kells, Whitehaven, Cumbria	30
West Lancashire (Skelmersdale)	Gardiners Place, Skelmersdale WN8 9SP	40
West Fife	Hillend, Dunfermline, Fife	30
West Dyfed	Hobbs Point, Pembroke Dock, West Dyfed	30
West Lothian	Ladywell, Livingston, West Lothian	30

ITeC	Location	Training places
Wigan	Clayton Street, Wigan, Lancashire	40
Wirral (Marconi)	Field Road, Wallasey, Merseyside	70
Wolverhampton	Strawberry Lane, Wednesfield, West Midlands	38
Worcester	Orchard Street, Worcester WK5 3DY	30
Wrexham	Whitegate Industrial Estate, Wrexham, Clwyd	30
York	17 Skeldergate, York, North Yorkshire	30

Multi-fibre Arrangement

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to propose more favourable terms for Third world producers under the new multi-fibre arrangement currently being negotiated; if these will include the exemption of the poorest countries from quota restrictions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: The GATT secretariat has produced a study on "Textiles and Clothing in the World Economy" at the request of the GATT council in order to assist discussion. A copy of this study has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. We have also commissioned a report from Professor Silberston of Imperial College on the implications for the United Kingdom economy of international trading policies affecting textiles and clothing, which is due to be published in December. These studies will assist in our policy deliberations, which will cover such issues as those posed in the hon. Member's question.

Life Insurance Policies (Surrender Values)

Dr. Glyn asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to require life insurance companies to quote approximate surrender values for years prior to maturity of a policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: The statutory "cooling off" notices, under section 75 of the Insurance Companies Act 1982, warn that surrender values may be less than premiums paid, particularly in the early years of a life policy, and that some life policies do not have a surrender value. Moreover, the life insurance industry's statement of long-term insurance practice also provides, amongst other things, for a warning to similar effect being included in appropriate sales literature, as well as for life insurance documents indicating the rights to surrender values in a contract.

I have no plans for further legislative action.

Trade Liberalisation

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to propose, under the auspicies of the general agreement on tariffs and trade, a new round of trade liberalisation talks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: The London economic summit in June referred to the important contribution which a new round of multilateral trade negotiations would make to strengthening the open multilateral trading system. The United Kingdom will continue to work through the European Community for a properly prepared new round. But it will be necessary to secure the willing and effective participation of GATT contracting parties as a whole.

DEFENCE

Tornado Crash (Italy)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what report he has had on the reasons for the crash of the Italian Tornado on 23 July, which left Gioia del Colle base, in Puglia. south east Italy and flew north west to the area of Muglia, near Castel del Monte.

Mr. Lee: As I told the hon. Gentleman on 1 August, at columns *281-82*, there is a continual exchange of flight safety information among the three nations which operate the Tornado aircraft. However, the release of information on the outcome of investigations into the accident on 23 July is a matter for the Italian authorities.

Nuclear Winter Theory

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Defence why his Department declined an invitation to take part in discussions about the nuclear winter theory; whether he has received documents on the subject from the organisers of the discussions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: I assume the hon. Gentleman is referring to the current tour organised by the so-called "Nuclear Free Zone Local Authorities" and "Scientists Against Nuclear Arms". My right hon. Friend has received the same invitation to a briefing session on the nuclear winter hypothesis as that believed to have been sent to right hon. and hon. Members generally. The Department is following this aspect of the nuclear debate and attendance is considered unnecessary.

RAF Finningley (Transfer of Operations)

Mr. Leigh asked the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to transfer operations from RAF Finningley to RAF Binbrook; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: It has been known for some time that RAF Finningley could be affected by National Coal Board mining operations, and the implications of this are being studied. The study is still in progress and it is too early to say whether some of Finningley's tasks might be transferred to RAF Binbrook.

RAF Basic Trainer (Contract)

Mr. Gerald Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a table showing how each of the four short-listed contenders for the new Royal Air Force basic trainer contract match up to the air staff target specifications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: No. The normal procedures will be followed in which full consideration will be given to the

detailed capabilities of each contender. It is not the practice to publish any such comparisons since the information is commercially confidential.

Low-flying Aircraft (Gwynedd)

Mr. D.E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any exercises involving low-flying aircraft over Gwynedd have been conducted by units of the United States air force in Europe.

Mr. Stanley: There have been no major low-flying exercises involving aircraft of the United States air force over Gwynedd this year. However, day-to-day routine training of USAF aircraft based in the United Kingdom includes low-level overflights of most parts of the country, including Gwynedd.

Expenditure Guidelines

Mr. George asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied that each of the services is operating within the expenditure guidelines laid down for the current financial year.

Mr. Stanley: The defence cash limit is set for our expenditure as a whole and is not calculated separately for each service. Equally, our management of cash expenditure is conducted against Votes, and not by service. Defence expenditure for 1984-85 is expected to be contained within the cash limit.

Greenham Common

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the hijacking of a service bus and car at RAF Greenham common and the driving of these vehicles into the base during the weekend of 2-3 November.

Mr. Stanley: On 1 November three out of six women who had been detected as trespassers attempted to drive away a USAF vehicle. They were prevented from doing so and were later removed from the base. On 4 November a group of women who had trespassed on to the base took a bus, which had been parked temporarily outside its secure compound, and drove to the cruise missile facility. They were seen, followed and detained by United Kingdom security personnel. Three have been charged with criminal damage and 18 with offences connected with the taking of the bus.

HMS Conquerer (Log Book)

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the loss of the log book of HMS Conqueror for the period around the dates of the sinking of the General Belgrano

Mr. Heseltine: I made such a statement on 7 November 1984, at column 106.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Law of the Sea (Convention)

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether it is Her Majesty's Government's intention to sign the convention on the law of the sea on or before 9 December and to ratify the treaty thereafter.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We have as yet taken no final decision. We remain in touch with other European countries which have not signed the convention.

Lisbon Agreement

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further progress has been made between Her Majesty's Government and the Spanish Government on the implementation of the Lisbon agreement which was signed on 10 April 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Since my last meeting with the Spanish Foreign Minister in New York on 25 September, when we reviewed the discussions which had taken place at official level, diplomatic contacts have continued. I expect to meet the Spanish Foreign Minister again soon. It remains our aim to achieve the earliest possible implementation of the Lisbon statement, which provides the best framework for managing our differences with Spain over Gibraltar.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reply he has sent to Mr. Colin Smith, of the Independent Falklands Farmers, about their petition against further agreements being signed by the Coalite Company.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No such petition has been received.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his discussions with Lord Shackleton and Mr. Michael Gregory, lawyer of the Country landowners' Association, about the Falkland Islands Company leasing policy.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No such discussions have been held. This is primarily a matter for the Falkland Islands Company and the Falkland Islands Government.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will invite Mr. Eric Varley, chairman of Coalite, to discuss Coalite's policy towards land reform in the Falklands.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have no plans at present to do so, although we are naturally in regular contact with Coalite and the Falkland Islands Company about matters concerning the Falkland Islands. Coalite's policy towards land reform in the Falklands is, however, primarily a matter for Coalite and the Falkland Islands Government.

British Embassies (Foreign Nationals)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the seven locations where foreign citizens sought sanctuary in a British high commission, or one of Her Majesty's embassies or consulates in recent years.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) told the hon. Member on 29 October, it would not be in the public

interest for me to give more details of the seven recorded occasions of foreign citizens seeking sanctuary in our missions abroad.

Central and South America

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for increasing the United Kingdom's diplomatic representation in Central and South America; whether he has any proposals to withdraw or reduce the United Kingdom's representation in these areas; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The level of diplomatic representation in Central and South America, as elsewhere in the world, is kept under constant review in the light of the requirements and the resources available.

Father Popieluszko

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Polish Government following the murder of Father Popieluszko; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: The murder of Father Popieluszko is a tragedy for Poland and for all who seek national reconciliation. The Polish authorities are continuing their investigations into the crime and have already made arrests. In these circumstances, the question of making representations to the Polish Government are not necessary.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

EC (Surpluses)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many days' supply is represented by products currently in surplus in the European Community.

Mr. Jopling: According to the latest available figures stock levels in the Community are as follows:

Commodity	*Date*	*Days' Supply Public Storage*	*Days' Supply Assisted Private Storage*
Cheese	25 October 1984	—	11
Butter	25 October 1984	237	47
Skimmed Milk Powder	25 October 1984	154	—
Wheat	25 October 1984	33	—
Barley	25 October 1984	15	—
Rye	25 October 1984	51	—
Durum	25 October 1984	82	—
Beef	30 September 1984	27	—
Beef	26 October 1984	—	5
Pigmeat	31 August 1984	—	2
Olive Oil	31 October 1984	34	—
Oil Seeds	31 October 1984	2	—
Sugar	7 November 1984	2	—
Wine	31 August 1984	—	83
Dried Grapes	8 November 1984	—	65
Figs	8 November 1984	—	44

Whisky

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what sanctions are available through the European Economic Community to prevent whisky being sold in European Economic Community countries at higher prices than equivalent spirits in public bars and restaurants.

Mrs. Fenner: None. Discriminatory taxation of spirit drinks is forbidden under article 95 of the treaty of Rome, but fixing retail prices for alcoholic drinks is a matter solely for commercial decision.

ENERGY

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the value of irretrievable machinery and equipment and the amount of coal not mined from the 20 working faces and eight salvage faces which have been lost to date during the current miners' dispute.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand from the National Coal Board that 20 working faces have been lost at the following collieries:

Castlehill
Polkemmet
Merton
Fryston
Hatfield
Rossington
Bentley
Highgate
Shirebrook
Markham (Derbyshire)
Tilmanstone
Bold
Penrikyber
Bedwas
Celynen South
St. Johns

Eight salvage faces have been lost at the following collieries:

Barony
Merton
Ackton Hall
Markham (Yorkshire)
Bullcliffe Wood
Houghton
Shirebrook

Questions about the financial and production losses arising from the loss of the faces are matters for the National Coal Board.

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy, of the 20 working faces which have been lost during the current miners' dispute, how many had benefited from Her Majesty's Government's capital investment programme; and if he will give the amount involved, a list of the collieries involved and the expected life of the mines.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I have given him today in which I indicated the collieries at which 20 working faces and eight salvage faces have been lost so far during the dispute.

The National Coal Board has benefited from massive investment, totalling £3·9 billion in the first five years of this Government. The detailed breakdown of this investment is a matter for the NCB. It is regrettable that any part of this major investment effort should be lost through the NUM's needless continuation of this damaging dispute.

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy, of the further 84 coal faces causing concern to the National Coal Board, how many collieries are involved; and what is the amount of capital investment at risk.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand from the National Coal Board that there are faces currently causing the board concern at about 50 collieries.

Concessionary Coal

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the amount of concessionary coal delivered to striking miners to date; and whether it is secured from opencast operations.

Mr. David Hunt: The supply of concessionary coal to its employees is a matter for the National Coal Board. However, the board advises that it is its policy not to supply fuel to striking mineworkers during any prolonged dispute, although exception might be made on compelling compassionate grounds.

Power Supplies

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Energy what arrangements he is making to deal with any emergency affecting power supplies arising from the current coal mining dispute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I do not presently envisage any emergency affecting power supplies arising from the current dispute in the coal industry.

Coal Imports

Mr. Allen McKay asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the total tonnage of imported coal for the years 1979, 1982, and the latest available year; what were the countries of origin and tonnage from each country; and if he will give the cost per ton.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested on coal imports for the years 1979, 1982 and 1983 is published in table 75 of the "Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1984", a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Coal Production

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much coal has been produced in National Coal Board pits since the National Union of Mineworkers' dispute began.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand from the NCB that since the beginning of the NUM overtime ban, deep-mined production from NCB collieries has been 40,987,000 tonnes to the end of August 1984.

SOCIAL SERVICES

NHS (Privatisation)

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proposals he has received from Liverpool area health authority about the privatisation of parts of the National Health Service in Liverpool.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke None. I expect to receive proposals from Liverpool district health authority by 31 December 1984.

Benefits (Cash Advances)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what instructions have been issued by his Department to managers of local offices regarding receipts being produced by persons in receipt of benefits who have obtained cash advances for the purchase of household goods and electrical and gas appliances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: Instructions to local office staff on this matter are in paragraphs 7061-7064 of the S manual, a copy of which is in the Library. Girocheques for items of furniture and gas and electrical appliances should normally be made out to the supplier. Where payment is made to the claimant a receipt is requested when there is doubt that the money will be spent properly.

NHS (Liverpool)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultations have taken place between the Liverpool area health authority and health service trade unions concerning privatisation in the National Health Service in Liverpool; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Consultations are a matter for the health authorities concerned.

Deaf -blind People (Mobility Allowance)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations his Department has received from the Deaf-Blind Helpers' League concerning the award of mobility allowance to deaf-blind people; what response has been made; if there is any action he is taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I met representatives of the Deaf-Blind Helpers' League on 12 March and I am writing to them in response to subsequent representations. The issues involved in deciding claims for mobility allowance from the deaf-blind are often complex and we are currently awaiting a decision on a relevant appeal which has been made to the House of Lords.

General Practitioners

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what safeguards, other than professional, exist to monitor the service provided by general practitioners; and if he will make a statement about the avenues of complaint open to the public with regard to these services.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Family practioner committees are responsible for administering arrangements for family practitioner services including those provided by general medical practitioners. The committees have a duty to ensure the adequacy of doctors' premises, to approve when and where certain services are to be provided and to monitor the standrards and use of deputising services in general medical practice. They also investigate complaints

involving practitioners informally under certain circumstances, and formally under the National Health Service (Service Committees and Tribunals) Regulations 1974 (as amended).

We have recently issued a leaflet entitled "Complaints about Dentists, Chemists, Opticians and Family Doctors" (June 1984) which is freely available to the public and explains the procedures for complaining about family practitioner services.

Advice and assistance may also be obtained, in pursuance of complaints from the family practitioner committees and from community health councils and citizens advice bureaux.

Drugs (GP Prescribing)

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the overall quantity of drugs in general and benzodiazepine in particular, prescribed by general practitioners in the past 12 months; and how these figures compare with the previous 12 months.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Private Nursing Homes

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what public or professional bodies exist to regulate the establishment of private nursing homes; and if he will make a statement on the safeguards which exist to ensure an adequate standard of service is provided by these homes.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: District health authorities are responsible for the registration of private nursing homes within their boundaries, and for ensuring that adequate standards are maintained. Health authorities are required to enter and inspect registered homes at least twice a year to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Nursing Homes Act 1975, as amended, and associated regulations. We are introducing further amendments to the legislation, from 1 January 1985, which will give health authorities additional powers to seek out unregistered premises offering nursing care, and to take action quickly in cases where registered homes are failing to meet the standards required.

Leeds Eastern District Health Authority

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to appoint a new chairman for Leeds eastern district health authority.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Regional and District Health Authorities (Chairmen)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many regional and district health authority chairmanships are currently vacant; and how long the vacancies have existed.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Health Services for Children

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what progress has been made in the departmental study of health services for children announced in Cmnd. 9298, page 32; by whom the study is being conducted; and when a final report is expected.

Mr. John Patten: A small multidisciplinary team of officials is making a series of visits to different district health authorities in England to collect information for the Department about the administration of community child health services. The visits are expected to be completed by mid-1985. As indicated in Cmnd. 9298, the need for further action will be considered in the light of the information gathered.

Asthmatics (Prescribed Drugs)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide home nebulisers for asthmatics on prescription.

Mr. John Patten: For effective use, a nebuliser needs a special driving device such as an oil-free air compressor pump or special flow-head fitted to a cylinder of compressed air. If it is medically essential for a particular patient, including one suffering from asthma, to practise nebulisation at home, nebulisers and their driving mechanism may be provided on the NHS through the hospital service. We cannot justify the considerable additional cost of supplying this equipment on GPs' prescription.

GPs may prescribe a range of hand-held metered-dose aerosols with spacing devices which are effective alternatives to nebulising equipment for some patients.

Claimants (Available Scale Margin)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list each specific different group of claimants which will have an extra 50p deducted under the available scale margin rule after 26 November, and the amounts that will be saved in each case.

Mr. Whitney: About 400,000 people on the long-term rate of supplementary benefit currently receive additions to their benefit for special needs which are paid after deduction of the 50p available scale margin. These people will be up to 50p a week less well off than they would otherwise have been after the general uprating of benefits at the end of this month when the deduction will be increased to £1. They are in the following groups:

	Number affected (thousands)	*Estimated savings 1984/85*	*(£ thousands) Full year*
Supplementary pensioners	345	About 3,100	About 9,000
Sick and disabled*	30	About 300	About 800
Single parent families*	15	About 150	About 400
Unemployed men aged 60-64*	5	About 50	About 150
Others*	5	About 50	About 150

* Receiving supplementary allowance.

However, about 170,000 pensioners will be better off because of the forthcoming extensions to heating additions. Overall, the changes announced by my right hon. Friend on 18 June, at columns 20-22, will increase expenditure on social security benefits by some £1,600 million.

Benefit Claimants (Jury Service)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will seek to ensure unemployment and supplementary benefit claimants receive payment of housing benefit and unemployment benefit or supplementary benefit for Saturdays and Sundays whilst on jury service.

Mr. Newton: A claimant is not entitled to unemployment benefit during jury service, but he can claim compensation from the court for days of unemployment benefit lost, including any Saturday which falls within that period. As unemployment benefit is not payable for Sundays, no compensation can be claimed for that day. Supplementary benefit is not affected by periods of jury service and full weekly benefit continues to be paid in the normal way. Housing benefit is a means-tested weekly benefit and eligibility is not affected by a period of jury service.

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many persons, male and female, were admitted to hospital in the United Kingdom for treatment for the side effects of drugs in the benzodiazepine group in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983;

(2) what was the nature of the side effects for which people were admitted to hospital in the United Kingdom resulting from the taking of prescribed drugs in the benzodiazepine groups in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether his Department will publish the results of research sponsored by it into the side effects of taking drugs in the benzodiazepine group;

(4) what research has been sponsored by his Department into the side effects of prescribed drugs in the benzodiazepine group in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Drug Addiction

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people, male and female, were admitted to hospital in the United Kingdom for treatment for addiction to prescribed drugs in the benzodiazepine group in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not have separate figures for admissions for dependence on drugs in this particular group.

Drugs (Repeat Prescriptions)

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether any steps have been taken to monitor repeat prescriptions for drugs in the benzodiazepine groups in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983; and with what results;

(2) what guidance has been issued to the medical profession on the monitoring of repeat prescriptions of drugs in the benzodiazepine group in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983; and if he has any plans to issue further guidance.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We cannot identify repeat prescriptions of drugs from any data we hold centrally. Records of prescribing for individual patients, including any continuing medication, are held only by their general practitioners.

The British National Formulary, which is distributed free of charge by our Department to all NHS prescribing doctors, stresses that sedatives and tranquillisers, of which Benzodiazepines are the most commonly used, should not be prescribed routinely but reserved for short courses to alleviate acute conditions.

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many of the prescriptions written for drugs in the benzodiazepine group in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983 were repeat prescriptions;

(2) what was the total cost to the National Health Service of prescriptions written in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983 for drugs in the benzodiazepine group;

(3) what was the total number of prescriptions written in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983 for drugs in the benzodiazepine group.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The number and cost of prescriptions written by general practitioners and dispensed by chemists and appliance contractors in England for drugs in the benzodiazepines group was as follows. All figures are estimates based on a one in 200 sample of dispensed prescriptions.

	Number of prescriptions million	*Basic ingredient cost £ million*
1980	23·9	27·5
1981	24·2	31·9
1982	24·4	35·3
1983*	17·7	27·1

* January to September.

Information is not yet available for the 4th quarter of 1983.

No information is available about the numbers of repeat prescriptions.

Distinction Awards

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what criteria the newly awarded distinction awards to medical practitioners are made.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Distinction awards are made only to consultants and community physicians in the NHS.

The criteria used by the advisory committee on distinction awards in recommending my right hon. Friend to grant distinction awards were set out by the immediate past chairman, Sir Stanley Clayton, MD MS FRCP FRCS FRCOG, in an article published in "Health Trends" (November 1979). They include direct service to patients or their general practitioners, improvement of the service training and teaching research, medical administration, and clinical or academic distinction. Hard work and outstanding service to the NHS may alone be sufficient reason for an award, particularly at the B and C levels.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what criteria increases in the grading of existing distinction awards in teaching district health authorities are made.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The criteria used by the advisory committee on distinction awards in recommending awards for consultants and community physicians in teaching district health authorities are the same as those used for practitioners from non-teaching authorities.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he intends to fund all distinction awards to medical practitioners centrally.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. Health authorities meet the costs of distinction awards.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to publish the names of members of the advisory committee on distinction awards, including central awards committee, each regional higher awards committee, and regional C awards committee in the medical press each year.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is open to the medical press to publish the names of the members of the central advisory committee on distinction awards at any time. Membership lists of all other committees are readily available to interested practitioners through their local medical advisory machinery or on request to the secretariat.

Benefits (Borders Area)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of families being supported by *(a)* supplementary benefit, *(b)* unemployment benefit, *(c)* family income supplement and *(d)* single parent benefit in the Borders area of his Department for each year since 1979.

Mr. Whitney: The Borders area is covered for supplementary benefit purposes by one DHSS office and for unemployment benefit purposes by two unemployment benefit offices.

The total number of *(a)* supplementary benefit cases and *(b)* unemployment benefit cases handled at May of each of the years requested was:

(a) Supplementary benefit

	Number
1979	3,951
1980	3,845
1981	4,514
1982	5,257
1983	5,778
1984	5,947

(b) Unemployment benefit

	Number
1979	522
1980	619
1981	*
1982	1,061
1983	1,185
1984	*

* Not available.

Information on the number of families paid these benefits is not available. Figures of those paid unemployment benefit in 1981 and 1984 are not available due to industrial action.

Information is not available about family income supplement and single parent benefits in individual local office areas.

Nurses

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many *(a)* qualified and *(b)* unqualified nurses are employed by the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The requested information is as follows:

Nursing and midwifery staff England—30 September 1983*

	Number
Qualified	223,500 (WTE)‡
Unqualified†	171,200 (WTE)‡

* Excludes agency staff.

† Includes nurse learners and qualified nurses undertaking training for a further qualification.

‡ Whole-time equivalent.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many *(a)* state-registered nurses and *(b)* state-enrolled nurses are currently unemployed.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are not in a position to collect this information. There are always vacant nursing posts in less popular specialties in certain parts of the country.

Working Paper C

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish working paper C, commissioned by his Department from the Policy Studies Institute and presented to his Department in July.

Mr. Newton: Working paper C is one of a number of papers produced by the Policy Studies Institute, which we commissioned to research into the effects of the 1980 changes to the supplementary benefit scheme. It was given to the Department, in draft, later than the other papers, and we have a number of comments on the draft which are still being considered by the institute.

Clinicians (Award Holders)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make it his policy to publish annually in the medical press the names of clinicians who are award holders.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. If the names of award holders were publicly disclosed, patients and others might make misleading judgments on the standing of the recipients without appreciating all the factors involved in the granting of awards. The names of award holders are, however, available to practitioners generally within their region on request to the regional medical officer.

Drugs (Self-help Groups)

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what grants were made to self-help groups by his Department in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983 to deal with withdrawal problems for those who had been prescribed drugs in the benzodiazepine group in the years 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The only grant made to a voluntary organisation providing services specifically for

problem benziodiazepine users in the years mentioned by the hon. Member was one of £10,183 to Tranx, Harrow for 1983-84.

However, a number of voluntary organisations have received grants for services to problem drug-takers during this period and some of these include benzodiazepine users among their clientele. Grants to all voluntary organisations in the drugs field totalled £285,690 in 1980-81, £347,360, in 1981-82, £433,174 in 1982-83 and £1,040,091 in 1983-84.

Resettlement Units

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the future of Department of Health and Social Security resettlement units.

Mr. Newton: The future of resettlement units is still under consideration.

Miners (National Insurance Contributions)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if striking miners, claiming supplementary benefit for their families, will be credited for national insurance contributions.

Mr. Newton: A person who is disqualified for receiving unemployment benefit because of the trade dispute provisions is not entitled to credits for national insurance contributions, irrespective of whether he receives supplementary benefit for his family.

Newcastle Offices (Carpeting)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the cost of the carpets laid recently in his Department's offices in Newcastle.

Mr. Newton: The Department's central offices in Newcastle employ 10,500 staff and require over 1·3 million sq. ft. of carpeting. In the financial year 1984-85 to date some 92,000 sq. ft. of carpeting have been laid to replace worn and damaged carpeting, at a cost of £80,880.

Newcastle Offices (Taxi Service)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much extra the taxi service for out-of-hours staff at his Department's Newcastle offices will cost as a result of the proposed changes in staff rotas.

Mr. Newton: Additional costs of taxi service up to an estimated maximum of £10,000 a year could arise, but only if the night shifts were timed to start when public transport to the office was no longer available. The shift times remain open to local negotiation.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 12 November 1984

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Expenditure

Mr. Gerald Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about expenditure on education and science in 1985-86.

Sir Keith Joseph: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his statement today, provision for education and science will be increased by £210 million to £13,590 million from the figures in Cmnd. 9143 after allowing for the abolition of the national insurance surcharge from April 1985. Three-quarters of the programme is local authority current expenditure which, after allowing for the transfer of funds to the Manpower Services Commission, is increased by nearly £300 million. There is a net reduction of £24 million in vote expenditure.

2. The level of services that can be afforded within the cash plans will again depend on the ability of local authorities and others to contain their costs, including those of pay settlements. The policies outlined as follows are compatible with the Government's assumption of pay increases of 3 per cent. in 1985-86 for those groups for which the Government are responsible.

LOCAL AUTHORITY EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION, SCHOOL MEALS AND MILK

3. Within total relevant planned current expenditure in England in 1985-86 of over £21,000 million, it is for local authorities to decide the balance between services, taking into account their statutory obligations and Government policies. The total allocated to education in the Government's plans is £10,259 million. This represents an increase of about 6 per cent. in cash over the sum allocated to the service in 1984-85 after allowing for the abolition of the National Insurance Surcharge and the transfer of some funding to the Manpower Services Commission. In addition, as in the last two years, part of total current expenditure will be treated as an amount not allocated between services. This is in recognition of the fact that some local authorities will spend more than the Government consider to be desirable on services including education and need more time to bring spending into line with Government plans. The size of the sum in 1985-86 will be £600 million.

4. Within the planned total for expenditure on education, the level of spending by individual local education authorities will depend upon their local decisions and upon their success in containing costs. If local authorities with education responsibilities spend at their provisional 1985-86 targets, their expenditure would in aggregate increase by about 2·7 per cent. compared with 1984-85 budgets at a time when school rolls are continuing to fall.

5. The figure of £10,259 million includes £280 million for school meals and milk. A number of local education authorities have been able to make substantial reductions in net expenditure under this head. I look to authorities to review the provision that they make for school meals in order to secure savings in line with the Government's plans thereby releasing resources to support policies more directed to the educational benefit of pupils and students.

Schools

6. Overall, school rolls will continue to fall and the plans assume that authorities will secure a further reduction in the number of school teachers they employ. Provided the cost of employing staff can be contained, there should be scope for a continuing modest improvement in pupil-teacher ratios, compared with January 1984. This would give authorities the opportunity to make some progress with the implementation of policies for schools outlined in my speech at Sheffield earlier this year. The situation will vary between authorities, depending on factors such as their expenditure targets and their ability to redeploy teachers quickly in response to falling rolls. I look forward to discussions with the local education authorities about the paper "Schoolteacher Numbers and Deployment in the Longer Term", which the Department made available last September.

7. Authorities are continuing to make significant savings through taking surplus places out of use and remain on course to take over 1 million places out of use by March 1987. I have agreed with the local authority associations that new targets should be adopted for taking further surplus places out of use by 1987 and for future years and I shall be discussing with them what these should be.

8. The latest firm information on expenditure on books shows a significant increase in the level of provision per pupil between 1981-82 and 1982-83. If costs can be contained and savings made elsewhere — for example, in caretaking and cleaning cost — there should be scope for some further improvement in expenditure per pupil compared to 1982-83 levels in many authorities both in the provision of books and equipment and expenditure on repairs and maintenance.

Non-Advanced Further Education

9. The overall level of resources proposed should enable authorities to respond to the growing and varied demand for NAFE. There are inevitable uncertainties about student numbers. The plans assume some limited increase in the participation rate of 16 and 17 year olds in future years.

10. The student: staff ratio slackened by about 2 per cent. between 1982-83 and 1983-84. The expenditure plans as they relate to NAFE imply some limited tightening of the SSR between 1983-84 and 1985-86. It should be possible in aggregate for the 1982-83 level of provision per student on books and equipment to be maintained in the great majority of local authorities if other non-teaching costs can be restrained.

11. The plans for net expenditure on NAFE assume the transfer of £61·75 million to the Manpower Services Commission following the White Paper 'Training for Jobs' (Cmnd. 9135) to enable it to purchase a more significant proportion of work-related non-advanced further education.

In-Service Training

12. Both the Government and the local authorities attach importance to in-service training as a means of further developing the skills of teachers in schools and in further education in response to changing demands and priorities. I have agreed with leaders of the local authority associations that the scheme of in-service training grants first introduced last year should be further enlarged in 1985-86. Grant of £17·5 million will be available in the 1985-86 financial year, and three new priority areas will be included in the scope of the scheme. These will apply to a special programme to support the introduction of general certificate of secondary education; the teaching of craft, design and technology in schools; staff development associated with professional, industrial and commercial updating (PICKUP) programmes in further education, and the updating of staff on work-related courses.

Education Support Grants (ESGs)

13. The Education (Grants and Awards) Act 1984 comes into operation for the first time in 1985-86. The Government intend to support some £30 million of expenditure on activities in support of national priorities through £21 million of grant. The choice of activities to be supported follows detailed consultation with the local authority associations and the breadth of support is reflected in the fact that all but one authority have bid for support in 1985-86 and that each of the eleven activities for which bids were invited was oversubscribed. Decisions on the allocations to authorities of expenditure to be supported under the Act will be announced next month.

Capital Expenditure

14. Provision for local authority capital expenditure on education will be £272 million. This represents a reduction on plans of £18 million. The reduced provision should permit continuing progress with the removal of surplus school places and with selective re-equipment in further education. The

Department will be writing as soon as possible to local education authorities to inform them of the allocations within the education block.

Higher Education

15. The cash available for each sector is set out below. The figures allow for a tuition fee of £520 for home full-time and sandwich course students on courses designated for mandatory student awards. The UGC and NAB plans for student admissions in 1985-86, together with admissions to direct grant institutions, are likely to satisfy the revised lower level of demand for higher education, as indicated by the projection in the "Report on Education No. 100".

Student Awards

16. There will be a net reduction in the previously planned level of spending on student awards in 1985 and the parental contribution scale will be adjusted upwards in line with earnings in the past year; this means that some 10,000 families who would otherwise have been drawn into contributing will be relieved of the need to do so. However, minimum maintenance awards will no longer be made to those whose parents would otherwise be liable to meet the full cost of maintenance and contributions from those in the middle and upper reaches of the income scale will be increased. In addition the income scale will be extended, for those most able to pay, to include a contribution up to the maximum of the designated tuition fee. Details of the new rates of award and revised contribution scales will be announced later.

Universities

17. Subject to parliamentary approval, the total of recurrent grant for universities in the UGC list for 1985-86 academic year will be £1,309 million. This total has been set at a level consistent with previously planned economies and with the Government's 3 per cent. assumption for pay. To the extent that the academic year falls partly in the 1986-87 financial year the grant is subject to review in the normal way.

18. The revised grant for the 1984-85 academic year will be £1,262 million. This takes account of the revised pay assumption for the period 1 April to 31 July 1985.

19. Equipment grant for the academic year 1985-86 will be £90·4 million, a cash increase of 3 per cent. compared with 1984-85. In addition, I intend, subject to further discussion with the UGC, to make available £10 million in each of financial years 1985-86 and 1986-87 to enable them to operate a scheme for the improvement of laboratory and equipment provision in a few carefully selected centres of research.

Advanced Further Education

20. Followng consultation with the local authority associations, I have determined under regulations made under the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 the quantum of advanced further education (AFE) expenditure within the predetermined pool in 1985-86 at £620 million. After allowing for the abolition of the national insurance surcharge, this represents an increase of over 7·5 per cent. compared to the size of the quantum for 1984-85. The revised total provides for a further overall increase in student numbers and a shift in the balance of students towards science and engineering in 1985-86. Compared to existing provision the total implies continuing reductions in unit costs and in lecturer numbers, leading to a student : staff ratio averaging 12 : 1 in the 1985-86 academic year. The National Advisory Body is at present considering the method of distributing the quantum for 1985-86 between authorities including the possibility that a limited sum from within the quantum might be used to support some modest new initiatives. I will decide on each authority's share of the quantum later in the year in the light of the NAB's advice.

21. Following consultations with the Voluntary Sector Consultative Council I have determined the quantum of AFE expenditure at voluntary colleges grant-aided solely by my Department at £41 million. I will decide its distribution between the colleges later this year in the light of NAB's advice.

The Science Budget

22. The Science Budget for 1985-86, from which the research councils receive their grants in aid, will be £587 million, an increase in cash of £14 million over previous published plans for that year. Of this, I am setting aside £6 million to be used, in the light of advice from the ABRC, to assist research councils to make progress with the plans for major restructuring on which they have embarked. These plans will as they are implemented release substantial resources for redeployment to areas of high scientific promise. The remaining £8 million of the £14 million increase will be distributed following advice from the ABRC. My hope is that this will enable Councils to fund more university research projects of the highest quality.

Teachers

Mr. Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teachers have been struck off the list of qualified teachers by his Department in the current year; how this compares to previous years; for what offences teachers have been struck off; and what measures are taken to identify and remove such teachers.

Mr. Dunn: During the financial year 1983-84, 36 persons were totally excluded and 3 partially excluded from employment as teachers on the grounds of their misconduct. The comparable figures for the two previous years are as follows:

Year	*Total Exclusions*	*Partial Exclusions*
1982-83	36	3
1981-82	40	5

The majority of such exclusions followed sexual, financial and drug offences. The individuals are identified from reports made by their employers and by the police. To make exclusion effective the Department gives details in confidence to local education authorities and all other bodies concerned with the employment of teachers.

Mathematics Teachers

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of teachers of mathematics in maintained middle schools had no recorded qualification in that subject at the latest available date; and what steps he is taking to reduce this percentage.

Mr. Dunn: In middle schools, mathematics is taught partly by specialist and partly by class teachers. In a survey of 48 maintained middle schools for pupils aged 9-13 undertaken in 1979-80 HM inspectors found 579 teachers teaching mathematics, of whom 110 (19 per cent.) had studied mathematics as part of a first degree or as a main subject in their teaching certificate. Of the 35 teachers who taught mathematics for more than half of their week, 21 (60 per cent.) were so qualified.

I have described the measures which the Government are taking to improve initial training in mathematics and the supply of specialist teachers of the subject in the answers I am giving today to my hon. Friend's other questions. These measures will be relevant to raising the level of qualification of those teaching mathematics in middle schools.

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what efforts he is making to attract more mathematics graduates into teaching, following the recommendation of the Cockcroft report.

Mr. Dunn: The Government have maintained the number of initial teacher training places in mathematics within a total provision of training places for intending secondary teachers which has been reduced because of falling secondary school rolls. Recruitment to post-graduate courses in mathematics has been good for the last four years and we expect the supply of newly-trained mathematics teachers to be adequate in relation to the

number of vacancies for them. The Department's recruitment literature stresses the good opportunities for mathematics graduates within the teaching profession.

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to review and evaluate the courses provided for the initial training of future mathematics teachers following the remarks in the Cockcroft report on the variety of practice that existed at the time of publication of that report.

Mr. Dunn: All initial teacher training courses, including those for intending mathematics teachers, will be reviewed over the next three to four years by the new Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. Courses will be assessed against a set of rigorous criteria, which include requirements relating to the academic and professional content of courses and specify a minimum amount of time to be devoted to the study of teaching mathematics in primary training.

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of teachers of mathematics in maintained secondary schools had no recorded qualification in that subject at the latest available date; and what steps he is taking to reduce this percentage.

Mr. Dunn: The latest information currently available relates to November 1977, when it is estimated that 29 per cent. of teachers then teaching mathematics in maintained secondary schools in England and Wales did not have a recorded qualification in mathematics (no information was collected about qualifications at or below A level). A new survey of secondary school staffing was carried out in January this year and results will be available shortly.

My right hon. Friend wishes to see a reduction in the amount of teaching carried out by teachers whose qualifications are not well matched to their task. The steps which the Government are taking to achieve this were set out in the White Paper "Teaching Quality" published last year. In particular, the Department pays grant to local education authorities to release for further training teachers of mathematics in secondary schools who are inadequately qualified in the subject.

Overseas Students

Mr. Terry Fields asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he intends to set a maximum fee for overseas students; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend sets maximum fees only for overseas students who began their courses before 1 September 1980, who are excluded from the effects of the Government's policy that overseas students should pay fees that cover the cost of their education. For other overseas students, institutions and local education authorities are free to determine the fee to be charged in accordance with the Government's policy and in the light of their own circumstances.

Glue Sniffing

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to control glue sniffing among schoolchildren.

Mr. Dunn: As part of the Government's policy for tackling solvent misuse among young people, the Department issued in June a safety in education bulletin which included advice about solvent misuse. Copies of the bulletin have been sent to local education authorities for distribution to schools and colleges.

Inspectors' Reports

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will detail the current procedures for reviewing reports of independent schools' inspectors; and if he has any plans to alter them.

Sir Keith Joseph: Her Majesty's Inspectorate reports the findings of its formal inspections to me. Since January 1983 I have published all these reports, as written by Her Majesty's Inspectorate. The reports are issued to the local education authorities, schools and colleges concerned a fortnight before being made more widely available. Those responsible are asked to inform the Department within three months of the actions they consider necessary in the light of Her Majesty's Inspectorate's report, what they plan to do, and what implications the report may have for other schools or colleges in the area. I intend to continue these arrangements, unchanged.

Scottish Universities (Age Participation Rates)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information his Department has from the 1981 census on age-participation rates at universities in Scotland by social class.

Mr. Brooke: None. The 1981 census identified full-time students but not by the type of institution they attended.

University Students (Statistics)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information his Department now has from the 1981 census on the percentage of young people at university by social class of father; and how these percentages compare with corresponding figures for 1971.

Mr. Brooke: None. The 1981 census identified students in full-time education, but not the type of institution attended.

However, information about the social classes of the parents of students accepted for universities through the Universities' Central Council of Admissions (UCCA) in 1983 was published in table E8 of the statistical supplement to its 21st report, a copy of which will be placed in the Library. Similar information has been published by UCCA since 1980.

University Grants Committee (Computers)

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many computers are available to the University Grants Committee.

Mr. Brooke: The University Grants Committee has a small microcomputer and has access to a computer bureau, and to the Department of Education and Science computer at Darlington.

Independent Schools

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he is satisfied with his powers under section 71 of the Education Act 1944 in respect of the conduct of independent schools.

Mr. Dunn: Yes.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will list in the *Official Report* those independent schools on which a notice of complaint has been served under section 71 of the Education Act 1944 in each of the last 10 years and those schools which have consequently been deleted from the independent schools register.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested is as follows:

1975
†Ivey House school, Shepton Mallet
Holmewood House school, Tunbridge Wells
St. Anne's high school, South Shields
*The High school, Swindon
*Freightliners Free school, London N7
1976
Presentation college, Reading
Barbara Speake stage school, London W3
†St Nicholas school, Bath
The School, Oxford
*Picton House school for girls, Swindon
1977
Cotswood House school, Nottingham
Marsden school, Walmer, Kent
Kitebrook House school, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos
1979
Bnois Jerusholaim girls school, London N16
†The Associated Arts school, London SW19
1981
Emanuel school, London SW11
1982
†St David's school, London SW7
Mary Underwood prep and theatre school, Rochester
Broughton House, Brant Broughton, Lincs
*Durnford House, Evesham
1983
Kingsley prep, Wirral
Mary Underwood prep & theatre school, Maidstone
Howsham Hall, York
*Franklin House, London N22
†Hillycroft school, Tunbridge Wells
1984
†Coventry Christian academy, Coventry
Talmud Torah Machzikei Hadass, London E5
North London Talmud Torah, London N16
St Neots school, Nr Basingstoke
Scarisbrick Hall, Ormskirk, Lancs
The Goddard school, Swindon
†Hillycroft school, Tunbridge Wells
Acorn school, Romford
Duff-Miller Tutors, London SW5
Howsham Hall, York
Zakariya Girls' High school, Batley

* denotes those schools struck off the Register of Independent Schools under section 72.
† denotes the schools which have closed of their own volition.

Corporal Punishment

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the proposals outlined in the Queen's Speech concerning the rights of parents to exempt their children from corporal punishment will extend to those parents whose children are educated under the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Dunn: Yes.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the proposals outlined in the Queen's Speech concerning the rights of parents to exempt their children from corporal punishment will extend to those children whose school fees are paid, in sum or in part, by the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Dunn: No.

Boarding School Allowance Scheme

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to in how many schools currently educating children of Her Majesty's forces personnel under the boarding school allowance scheme those children constitute, *(a)* less than 10 per cent., *(b)* more than 10 per cent., *(c)* more than 20 per cent., *(d)* more than 30 per cent., *(e)* more than 40 per cent., *(f)* more than 50 per cent. and *(g)* more than 75 per cent. of its pupils.

Mr. Dunn: The Department does not collect this information.

Secondary Schools (Closures)

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy regarding amending proposals put forward by local authorities to close or amalgamate secondary schools pursuant to the Education Act 1980, before those proposals are adopted by the local authority concerned.

Mr. Dunn: It is for local education authorities, in consultation with the governors of voluntary aided and special agreement schools, to take a view on the form and pattern of secondary education best suited to local circumstances and the preferences of parents and, when necessary, to publish proposals as required by the Education Act 1980. Where such proposals fall to my right hon. Friend to decide, he may approve or reject them or may approve them with such modifications which, after consultation with the local education authority concerned, he thinks desirable. However his powers of modification are limited since he cannot so change proposals as to make it impossible to regard what is there as still being the original in modified form.

Within these limits, my right hon. Friend's policy is to exercise this power where he has certain reservations but is otherwise minded to give his approval, to bring proposals more into line with his policies, particularly those set out in circulars 2/80, 2/81 and 4/82. Once proposals have been determined by the local authority or approved by my right hon. Friend, he may also, at the request of the authority, modify any proposals which they are required to implement by virtue of the Act.

Cash Limits

Mr. Gerald Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he intends to revise any of the cash limits within his programme in 1984-85.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend proposes to reduce the cash limit on the Central Administration vote by £422,000 from £49,991,000 to £49,569,000. This reduction results from a misallocation of provision transferred from the Property Services Agency in respect of accommodation charges. This announcement reflects

one being made by my right hon. Friend the Attorney-General, which, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, will make the corresponding increase to the cash limit on the Treasury Solicitor's vote, class IX vote 9.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Supreme Court (Official Referees)

69. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Attorney-General if he is satisfied with the rate of disposal of cases by the official referees of the Supreme Court.

The Attorney-General: Her Majesty has recently appointed two new circuit judges to dispose of official referees' business, thereby bringing the total number of official referees in London to six. These additional appointments should increase the rate of disposal and reduce the backlog of cases. The position will be kept under review.

County Courts

70. **Mr. Alex Carlile** asked the Attorney-General whether Her Majesty's Government have any proposals for increasing the staffing level in county courts in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Staffing levels are maintained as necessary to ensure a satisfactory level of service having regard to the predicted volume of work in particular courts. Within the overall ceiling of the Department additional manpower is allocated to deal with increases in the volume of business.

Defamation

Mr. Waller asked the Attorney-General if he will seek to make legal aid available in respect of cases of defamation.

The Attorney-General: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend on 19 March 1984 at column *698-99*.

Duties

Mr. Baldry asked the Attorney-General what are the duties by statute and convention of the Attorney-General.

The Attorney-General: My duties, whether deriving from statute, from common law or simply from convention, are too numerous, and in some cases would require too detailed an exposition, to be described both comprehensively and accurately in a parliamentary answer. But the following is a summary list of the more important.

I am the Government's principal legal adviser and, as such, give legal advice to the Cabinet and Cabinet Committees collectively and to my Ministerial colleagues individually (or to the officials of their Departments). This advice may have to concern any aspect of Government business and may involve any branch of the law, whether civil or criminal, public or private, domestic or international. I frequently advise on questions concerning proposed legislation and I have a special responsibility in respect of issues of legal policy (for example, retrospective effect, unusual powers or burden of proof) arising in connection with such legislation. I answer in the House of Commons for the Lord Chancellor and his Department as well as for myself and my own Department, for the Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions and for the Treasury Solicitor's Department, and I am responsible for the carriage through the House of Commons of legislation which is promoted by the Lord Chancellor.

I have a general responsibility for litigation to which the Crown (or, in international tribunals, Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom) is a party and I may be asked to advise on specific issues in relation to such litigation: I regularly supervise the conduct of the more important cases. I am myself the formal plaintiff or defendant in proceedings under the Crown Proceedings Act 1974 where there is no Government Department that is specifically authorised under the Act for that purpose. In my capacity as guardian of the public interest, I bring proceedings ex officio to secure the observance of legal obligations, especially by public bodies or by private persons alleged to be committing a public wrong, and I authorise such proceedings to be brought in my name at the relation of other persons. It is in this capacity also that I bring proceedings for contempt of court. It is also my responsibility to initiate proceedings to have somebody declared a vexatious litigant. I act for the Crown, in its capacity as *parens patriae*, in charity matters and have a variety of functions in that field which sometimes involve my being a party to litigation to determine the duties of charitable trustees or to protect the interests of the objects of charity.

I nominate counsel to act for the Crown in both civil and criminal proceedings. In criminal matters, I superintend the discharge of his functions by the Director of Public Prosecutions and I have certain specific functions of my own in relation to prosecution: for example, prosecutions for certain offences can be brought only by me or with my consent and I also have the power to enter a *nolle prosequi*. I also have certain functions in relation to the proceedings of coroners' courts.

The above account relates to my functions as Attorney-General for England and Wales. I have similar, but not in all respects identical, functions in my capacity as Attorney-General for Northern Ireland. In particular, the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland operates under my general superintendence.

In addition to these matters in which I function as the legal adviser to the Government or as the representative of the Crown, I also have certain responsibilities, by virtue of my office as Attorney-General, to the two Houses of Parliament. Thus, I have a limited responsibility for advising the House of Commons or any of its Committees on certain aspects of its business and in particular I am a member of the Committee of Privileges and give advice to that Committee. I also advise the House of Lords in peerage cases. In yet a different capacity, but still by virtue of my office as Attorney-General, I have certain duties and responsibilities as leader of the English Bar and as leader of the Northern Ireland Bar.

For a more comprehensive and discursive, though inevitably still incomplete, account of the functions of the Attorney-General, I refer my hon. Friend to the standard legal textbooks and in particular to Professor J. Ll. J. Edwards' seminal work, "The Law Officers of the Crown" (1964), which he has recently supplemented by a further book entitled "The Attorney General, Politics and the Public Interest" (1984).

Treasury Solicitor's Department

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Attorney-General whether any change has been made to the class IX, vote 9, cash limit for the Treasury Solicitor's Department.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IX, vote 9, will be increased by £1,295,000 from £12,062,000 to £13,357,000.

An additional £94,000 is required by the Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions for the establishment on 1 January 1985 of a fraud investigation group. Additional provision of £1,220,000 is required as a result of the misallocation of the provision transferred from the Property Services Agency for the property repayment services.

The increase will be partly offset by increased receipts of £19,000. In addition, £422,000 is being transferred from the Department of Education and Science to whom the Property Repayment Services provision was originally misallocated. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education is announcing today the consequent reduction to the cash limit on class X, vote 4. The remaining requirement of £873,000 will be charged to the Reserve and has been taken into account in the estimated outturn of the public expenditure planning total for 1984-85 given in the autumn statement on 12 November 1984.

PRIME MINISTER

Coal Industry (Dispute)

Mr. Nellist asked the Prime Minister if she will arrange for detailed information on the cost of the mining dispute to be collected and made available to Parliament in the manner of the information provided by the Secretary of State for Social Services in relation to the dispute at the computer centre in Tyne and Wear.

The Prime Minister: The final cost cannot be determined until the strike ends, but the scale of what would be involved for the PSBR if the strike continued until Christmas was given to the House by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 30 October at column 1184.

Lighthouse Board

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Prime Minister if she will seek to introduce public funding to defray the operating and maintenance costs of the lighthouse boards.

The Prime Minister: No.

Falkland Islands

Mr. David Young asked the Prime Minister what is the up-to-date cost of all Government operations in the Falklands since 2 April 1982 and the cost per capita in terms of the Falklands population.

The Prime Minister: Total extra Government expenditure in connection with the Falkland Islands from 2 April 1982 up to the end of the current financial year is forecast to amount to some £2,100 million, equivalent to just over £1 million per head of population. This includes the cost of recovering the islands following the Argentine invasion.

Nuclear Submarines (Log Books)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister whether she is satisfied with the security arrangements for the keeping of log books on nuclear submarines.

The Prime Minister: The circumstances attending the disappearance of Conqueror's control room log for the period April to September 1982 are being investigated by a Royal Navy board of inquiry. Any lessons arising from this inquiry will be incorporated into our security arrangements.

Local Government Expenditure (London)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Prime Minister what is the total of local government expenditure in London; and if she will break this down by authority in cash and percentage terms.

The Prime Minister: The information is as follows:

Local Authority Budgeted Net Current Expenditure—1984-85—London

	1984-85 budgets £ million	*1984-85 budgets Per cent. of all London*
GLC (adjusted for passenger transport)*	533·954	11·0
Passenger transport*	196·000	4·0
ILEA	899·513	18·5
Metropolitan Police PA	753·697	15·5
City of London	57·886	1·2
Camden	82·100	1·7
Greenwich	51·285	1·1
Hackney	66·204	1·4
Hammersmith and Fulham	48·217	1·0
Islington	66·488	1·4
Kensington and Chelsea	34·886	0·7
Lambeth	80·442	1·7
Lewisham	61·791	1·3
Southwark	81·633	1·7
Tower Hamlets	52·156	1·1
Wandsworth	56·542	1·2
Westminster	61·758	1·3
Barking and Dagenham	58·375	1·2
Barnet	95·059	2·0
Bexley	75·065	1·5
Brent	141·337	2·9
Bromley	91·576	1·9
Croydon	105·905	2·2
Ealing	112·399	2·3
Enfield	88·613	1·8
Haringey	112·626	2·3
Harrow	64·302	1·3
Havering	84·585	1·7
Hillingdon	86·307	1·8
Hounslow	80·079	1·6
Kingston-Upon-Thames	42·429	0·9
Merton	56·779	1·2
Newham	114·813	2·4
Redbridge	73·908	1·5
Richmond-Upon-Thames	49·528	1·0
Sutton	53·971	1·1
Waltham Forest	97·646	2·0
TOTAL ALL LONDON	4,869·854	100·0

* GLC no longer has responsibility for passenger transport. Passenger transport expenditure is assumed here to be equal to the GLC's budgeted revenue support.

HMS Conqueror (Navigator's Log Book)

Mr. Gould asked the Prime Minister if the police have been instructed to make inquiries into the disappearance of the log book from HMS Conqueror.

The Prime Minister: No. This disappearance is being investigated by a Royal Navy board of inquiry.

ENVIRONMENT

Public Expenditure

Mr. Temple-Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will give details of his public expenditure programmes for 1985-86.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced the main changes to the Government's public expenditure plans for 1985-86 and later years. The following table gives details of the changes in my Department's programmes.

Resources for spending in the public sector next year will be very limited, and have been further stretched by the continuing over-spending by local authorities. As I announced on 24 July, we have had to increase local authority relevant current expenditure provision (adjusted for changes in the responsibilities of local authorities) by some £800 million. I have consulted local government on the various elements of the 1985-86 rate support grant settlement and will lay proposals before Parliament in December.

There was a substantial overspend on local authority net capital provision in 1983-84, and there is again likely to be an overspend in 1984-85. The figures in the table take account of both.

For housing we have made a small reduction of £65 million on the gross provision. Expenditure will be supported by a level of capital receipts £430 million higher than we assumed last year for 1985-86; this higher estimate has been made possible by the success and extension of our right-to-buy policies.

I shall be announcing later, in the usual way, the apportionment of this total between the local authorities and the Housing Corporation; and individual local authorities will be receiving their detailed housing investment programme allocations. I am considering whether any change should be made in the prescribed proportion of capital receipts which authorities may use to augment their allocations, bearing in mind that local authorities were told in Cmnd. 9143 that they could plan their programmes on the assumption that their allocations for 1985-86 would be not less than 80 per cent. of those in 1984-85.

Expenditure at these levels means that it is more important than ever to determine clear priorities for spending on housing and to seek the most cost effective solutions. It will be necessary for local authorities to concentrate more resources on the repair and renovation of their houses and flats and to make a start on dealing with the emerging problem of structural defects. Where authorities have blocks of flats or housing estates which need substantial renovation for which they do not have the resources in the near future, I will expect them to make strenuous efforts to find private sector partners who can take this on.

For private sector property, it was never the Government's intention that expenditure on Home Improvement Grants should continue indefinitely at the levels of the last 2 or 3 years. It is primarily the responsibility of owners to keep their own dwellings in repair and where necessary to finance improvements by borrowing on the security of their properties. Accordingly, I would like to see home improvement grants focussed increasingly on those who can least afford to pay for repairs and improvements. I will shortly be issuing a consultation paper on proposals for legislation to secure this objective and I hope that so far as practicable local authorities will be guided by the general sense of these proposals in budgeting for improvement and repairs grants in the next financial year.

The urban programme will be continued with total provision (including other Department's contributions) of over £300 million a year for 1985-86 and the following two years. Within this total, provision for partnership and programme authorities will be continued at about the present cash level next year. The traditional urban programme will be concentrated in fewer areas, but existing revenue grants will be continued for their present term of up to five years. Provision for urban development grant will continue at a level that will enable schemes already approved to proceed and new schemes to be brought forward. In the two later years resources will increasingly be concentrated on the areas of greatest need.

Provision for local authority local environmental services capital is unchanged from the White Paper. The reduction of £45 million is the net PES provision for New Town expenditure and reflects a corresponding increase in the forecast receipts from disposal of commercial and industrial assets. Gross New Town expenditure will be maintained at the previously planned level.

I have made some additional resources available to the Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission to reflect costs involved in their obligations under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, and a small addition to maintain the Heritage provision.

The external finance limit for water authorities in England and Wales for 1985-86 will be £203 million, including £14 million for land drainage grants administered by MAFF and £20 million allocated to the Welsh Water Authority. For the English water authorities, the Government intend that there should be a significant increase in the provision for water investment from this year's provision of £686 million, to £769 million in 1985-86. This will allow us to make faster progress on replacement, repair and maintenance of sewers and water mains, and on improving the quality of rivers, estuaries and coastal waters. To finance this investment consistently with the reduced external finance limit, the Government have decided to set the financial targets for the water authorities to achieve an average rate of return of 1·4 per cent. in 1985-86 compared with this year's average rate of return of about 1·0 per cent. This is the first step in a policy to raise the average rate of return over three years to 1·7 per cent. and then to 1·9 per cent.

As a result water charges will increase by rather more than the general rate of inflation. Discussions will now take place with individual authorities to give effect to these policies.

An extra £15 million has been allocated to the Property Services Agency in 1985-86 for major new works and maintenance of the civil estate.

£ million Cash

	1984-85	*1985-86*	
	Cmnd 9143 Provision	*Notional allocation of provision in Cmnd. 9143*	*Revised provision*
Total Local Authority Relevant Current Expenditure (covering all Departments' Services)	20,389	*20,829	21,315
Housing (Local Authorities, Housing Corporation, New Towns):			
Capital:			
Gross Expenditure	3,244	3,121	3,056
Receipts	−1,600	−1,300	−1,730
Net Capital Expenditure	1,644	1,821	1,326

	1984-85 Cmnd 9143 Provision	1985-86 Notional allocation of provision in Cmnd. 9143	1985-86 Revised provision
Current Expenditure†	847	779	979
Programme total: Net capital plus current	2,491	2,600	2,305
DOE Other Environmental Services			
Local Environmental Services Current Expenditure‡	2,260	2,338	2,372
Local Environmental Services Capital Expenditure:			
Gross Expenditure	549	547	547
Receipts	−360	−360	−360
Net Expenditure	189	187	187
New Towns (Industrial and Commercial Sewerage)	3	3	−42
Urban and Derelict Land Block (including Urban Current)	404	427	405
Royal Parks, Ancient Monuments, Heritage etc.	92	92	94
Central and Miscellaneous Services, Environmental Research	117	121	126
Environmental Bodies, Development Commission	89	92	100
English Water Authorities External Finance Limit	264	243	183
Water Research, Other Water Services	10	10	9
British Waterways Board External Finance Limit	43	44	44
PSA:			
Office and General Accommodation‖	−86	−100	−85

* £20,493 million after adjustment for abolition of NIS and classification changes in respect of London Regional Transport and non advanced further education.

† Subsidies, rate fund contributions, and local and central government housing administration.

‡ Including costs of rate collection and of the births, marriages and deaths registration services.

‖ Negative provision reflects the fact that Departments' repayments to PSA for office accommodation at market rental values exceeds PSA's actual costs of provision because of its holdings of property on Crown leasehold and at low historic rents.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Glue Sniffing

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken on matters within his responsibility to combat the problem of glue sniffing.

Mr. Mellor: We issued a circular to chief officers of police in June this year setting out the various options and facilities open to the police. We have also consulted representatives of manufacturers and retailers on proposals to create an offence of selling substances to under-16s, knowing or believing that they are likely to be inhaled to achieve intoxication. The responses indicated widespread support for such legislation. The Government are prepared to support the introduction of a suitable Bill in Parliament.

Cable Authority

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to establish the new Cable Authority.

Mr. Brittan: In August I announced the appointment of Mr. Richard Burton as chairman of the Cable Authority. I have now appointed Professor James Ring to be deputy chairman and as members Mr. Paul Johnson, Mrs. Elizabeth MacDonald-Brown and Mr. Peter Paine. Further appointments will be announced in due course, but I propose now to make an order bringing into force the relevant provisions of the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984 so that the authority, comprising the above members, can be formally constituted very shortly. It is intended that the authority will assume its full powers under the Act in a few weeks' time.

Charity Commission

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any changes to announce in the cash limit for the Charity Commission vote, class 13, vote 18.

Mr. Brittan: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit on the Charity Commission vote will be raised by £74,000 from £4,762,000 to £4,836,000. The increase provides principally for costs associated with the computer installation in the official custodians division.

The additional expenditure will be charged to the Reserve and has been taken into account in the estimated outturn of the public expenditure planning total for 1984-85 given in the autumn statement today.

Coal Industry (Dispute)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide details as to the occupations of all persons arrested in the past 12 weeks on picket line duty at National Coal Board pits.

Mr. Giles Shaw: During the 12 weeks from 14 August to 16 November 2,079 people were arrested in connection with the miners' dispute. The occupations of those arrested which became known to the police over the same period are as follows:

Occupation	*No.*
Miners	1,951
Retired Miners	3
Member of Parliament	1
Transport workers	9
Students	15
Medical workers	2
Non-manual workers	12
Manual workers	88
Servicemen	11
Housewives	12
Unemployed	69
Total	2,173

The figures do not exactly tally because during this period the police became aware of the occupations of some of those arrested earlier, and it is not possible to separate the information about these arrests from that given above.

Shop Hours

Mr. Robert B. Jones asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he expects to publish the report of the committee of inquiry into shop hours;

(2) whether he has received the report of the committee of inquiry into shop hours.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend has now received the report and intends to publish it as soon as possible.

Shop Act 1950

Mr. Robert B. Jones asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters he has received from hon. Members supporting the reform of the Shops Act 1950

Mr. Mellor: Since the defeat on 4 February 1983 of the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney), which would have repealed these restrictions, nine Members of Parliament have written to my right hon. and learned Friend supporting the reform of the Shops Act 1950.

Mr. Edward Hopson

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which Edward Hopson was released from Broadmoor; what advance warning was given to the police in Ealing; and what steps were taken to reduce the scope for him committing offences against children of the type for which he had originally been committed to Broadmoor.

Mr. Mellor: Mr. Hopson was conditionally discharged from Broadmoor hospital with the consent of the Home Secretary, under section 66(2) of the Mental Health Act 1959, in April 1982. Consent was given in the light of a recommendation for discharge from the responsible medical officer at Broadmoor and of reports from him and other staff there.

On discharge Mr. Hopson went to live in a hostel in Kensington. The Metropolitan police were notified so that they would be aware of his residence in their area. In March 1983 he moved to a council flat in Hanwell. The police would normally be informed of such a move; it is not clear from Home Office records that they were informed on this occasion, and we are checking on this.

Before being conditionally discharged, arrangements were made for Mr. Hopson to be supervised by a consultant psychiatrist from Broadmoor and by a probation officer, and for both of them to send regular reports to the Home Office, so that Mr. Hopson's progress in the community could be kept under review.

Mr. Mohammed Siddique

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why Mr. Mohammed Siddique, who is on remand at Winston Green prison, has not been allowed to grow a beard and was forcibly shaved during the week ended 2 November.

Mr. Mellor: Mr. Siddique has not been forcibly shaved. He has been advised that if he wishes to grow a beard he must apply to the governor to be allowed to do so; he has not done so.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he takes to ensure the reasonable health and comfort of those detained in custody between arrest and trial.

Mr. Mellor: Responsibility for the treatment of persons in police custody rests with the relevant chief officer of police. Home Office guidance to chief officers on the treatment of persons in police custody is contained in section 4 of the "Consolidated Circular to the Police on Crime and Kindred Matters", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The prison service has the duty of caring for the physical and mental health and welfare of every inmate in its custody, whether convicted or unconvicted. In any establishment this duty is shared between the medical officer and the governor and the governor is required to bring to my right hon. and learned Friend's attention any matter of concern which needs his consideration.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he intends to make with regard to time limits on the period between arrest and trial.

Mr. Mellor: We intend to seek powers in the Prosecution of Offences Bill to apply time limits to the period between an offender's first appearance in court following arrest or summons and his trial. My right hon. and learned Friend will determine the precise way in which these powers should be exercised after considering the results of field trials, which will explore the feasibility of particular time limits and their practical implications.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints his Department has received in the last six months concerning lengthy remands in custody.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. If the hon. Member has particular cases in mind and would write to me, I should be glad to look into the matter.

Passports (Northern Ireland)

Mr. McCusker asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many United Kingdom passports are currently held by United Kingdom citizens residing in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Waddington: I regret that the information requested is not available.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Northern Africa

74. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further aid proposals he intends to take in northern Africa.

Mr. Raison: Following my initiative the European Community Development Council decided on 31 October to allot £35 million to help fight African drought. £14 million of this is for food aid. This will be available for the Sahel countries in northern Africa, in addition to direct aid from Britain and elsewhere.

Africa (Drought Assistance)

76. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives Her Majesty's Government are currently taking to assist drought affected Africa.

Mr. Raison: We have food aid on its way shortly to Ethiopia and Mozambique. We have now committed to

Ethiopia most of the £5 million I announced recently for drought-stricken countries. We have taken the initiative in getting the Council of Ministers to endorse last week a new allocation by the European Community for the same purpose worth £35 million, of which over £20 million will be food aid. We have encouraged the world food programme and the wider UN system to reinforce their efforts to deal with the Ethiopian drought.

Developing Countries

79. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his European Economic Community counterparts on increasing assistance to developing countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: At the Development Council on 6 November, I discussed the various initiatives taken by the Community to aid developing countries. In particular Development Ministers endorsed an addition of 32 million ecu (£19 million) to the 1984 Community aid budget for emergency assistance to those suffering famine in Africa. On 11 October the Community offered 7 billion ecu (£4,140 million) for the 6th European development fund, an increase of over 50 per cent. on EDF V.

Lomé Convention

80. **Mr. Lester** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects negotiations for a successor to the Lomé convention to be concluded.

Mr. Raison: I expect negotiations to be concluded in time for the new convention to be signed in Lomé in early December.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's role in negotiations on the renewal of the Lomé convention.

Mr. Raison: Her Majesty's Government have pressed our partners in the European Community to accept further liberalisation of the trade arrangements in the Lomé convention; and urged the Commission to find ways to improve the quality of aid from the European development fund. Progress on both issues has been made.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement outlining the present state of negotiations on the third Lomé convention; and what assessment he makes of the prospects for the successful negotiation of a new convention.

Mr. Raison: The last set of negotiations between European Community and African, Caribbean and Pacific Ministers took place in Brussels from 9 to 13 October when agreement was reached on all but a limited number of points. I expect the negotiations to be concluded soon so that the new convention can be signed in Lomé in early December.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why Her Majesty's Government are proposing that the additional money to be provided by the entry to the European Economic Community of Spain and Portugal to the Lomé convention should be used to tackle the problem of the burden-sharing key for European Community member states.

Mr. Raison: Her Majesty's Government did not put forward this proposal. The Council agreed to it in order to meet the concerns of some member states that their contribution keys to the European development fund were above their shares of Community VAT.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration the Government are giving to the African, Caribbean and Pacific proposals for the third Lomé convention.

Mr. Raison: The Government and the Community have paid careful attention to African, Caribbean and Pacific state proposals, many of which have been accepted in the lengthy process of negotiating the new convention.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will make it their policy to insist that African, Caribbean and Pacific countries accept tighter control on the Stabex funds in the context of the negotiations for the third Lomé convention and that new concessions by the Community are conditional on further concessions from the African, Caribbean and Pacific states.

Mr. Raison: The arrangements for controlling Stabex transfers have now been agreed ad referendum between the Community and the African, Caribbean and Pacific states. I believe these new arrangements will lead to tighter control over the use of Stabex funds.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the nature and purpose of the Government's efforts in the context of a new Lomé convention to seek to ensure that African, Caribbean and Pacific countries recognise and encourage private economic operators.

Mr. Raison: The Government believe that private economic operators have an important role to play in the development of the economies of African, Caribbean and Pacific states. To that end we have been working for provisions to encourage European private investment, in particular to facilitate the negotiation of effective bilateral investment promotion and protection agreements.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts the Government are making with regard to the incorporation of human rights issues into the third Lomé convention.

Mr. Raison: The Government have been seeking a reference to human rights in the next convention. The Community has proposed mention of standard international texts such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The African, Caribbean and Pacific states have not yet formally responded.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government are seeking references to policy dialogue in the context of the negotiations regarding the proposed third Lomé convention.

Mr. Raison: The Government have strongly supported the Community's proposal for the concept of policy dialogue to be incorporated in the third Lomé convention.

I believe that the text which has now been agreed ad referendum with the African, Caribbean and Pacific states is satisfactory.

Sri Lanka

81. **Mr. Michael Morris** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, in the light of the success of the Victoria dam project in Sri Lanka, he will ensure that the aid programme continues to include a number of large-scale projects.

Mr. Raison: I am glad my hon. Friend has noted the success of the Victoria dam project. The aid programme will continue to finance sound development projects of whatever size within the resources available to it.

Ethiopia

82. **Mr. Robert B. Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is satisfied with the level of transport support he has been able to provide for the assistance of famine relief in Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: Yes, so far, but I expect further needs for spares and perhaps more vehicles to emerge, as well as for British equipment to enhance the handling capacity of the docks.

87. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the provision of emergency aid to Ethiopia.

89. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on overseas aid to Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: I refer my hon. Friends to the comments I made in the debate on Foreign Affairs on 9 November and to my earlier replies today.

88. **Mr. Best** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will state the amount of overseas aid given to Ethiopia for each of the last six years; and if he will specify the form of such aid.

Mr. Raison: Following are the details:

Figures for aid given directly to the Ethiopian Government

£'000

	1978	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Food Aid	1,187	1,921	1,091	22	5,194	2,510
Other financial aid*	1,106	1,063	149	2	48	508
Technical Cooperation	473	679	429	142	58	- 19
Total	2,766	2,763	1,669	166	5,300	3,037

* Comprises disaster relief and development loans and grants.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he intends to allocate grain from United Kingdom sources to meet Ethiopia's food requirements for 1985.

Mr. Raison: We will certainly contribute from the 1985 bilateral food aid programme: and I expect the 1985 European Community food aid programme, which is much larger, to make a major contribution also.

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Ethiopian authorities about their threat to move the Royal Air Force famine relief operation out of Addis Ababa.

Mr. Raison: No formal request from the Ethiopian authorities for such a move has been received.

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made at the United Nations to ensure that the Government of Ethiopia do not hinder the airlift of food and medical aid to that country.

Mr. Raison: None. But my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been in touch with Mr. Perez de Cuellar on the need for overall co-ordination of the relief effort, and the Secretary-General has now appointed Dr. Jansson for this purpose.

Falkland Islands

83. **Mr. Spearing** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is satisfied with the arrangements he has made with the Government of the Falkland Islands concerning purchase of land by Falkland Islanders.

Mr. Raison: Yes.

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what inquiries were made into damage in the road between the airport and Port Stanley in the Falklands; what was the result of those inquiries; what disciplinary action was taken against those involved; what action is now proposed to repair the damage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: The state of the Port Stanley airport road has been regularly monitored by engineering advisers, and there has also been investigations by the Royal Engineers and the Property Services Agency. This has shown that the Falklands climate and the nature of the usage of the road have led to unusually rapid deterioration, but I am advised that it is unlikely that contractual liability for the damge could be shown. Immediate repair work is being undertaken by the Royal Engineers.

Caribbean (Ministerial Visit)

84. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the recent visit to the Caribbean by the Minister for Overseas Development.

Mr. Raison: I visited Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica and Belize between 14 and 24 October 1984, to see something of Britain's aid programme in operation; to discuss development matters with local Ministers and officials; and to review our programmes with the British high commissions and ODA's development division in Barbados. While in Jamaica I signed a loan agreement for £2·5 million, to be spent on British machinery and equipment.

India

85. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will increase aid from the United Kingdom to India.

Mr. Raison: We have no plans to do so but will maintain our aid to India at a substantial level.

North African States

86. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the priorities which determine the Government's aid to north African states.

Mr. Raison: In deciding its allocation of aid the Government gives priority to developmental criteria. They also take account of any relevant commercial and political factors. Aid levels to north African states have been set with these points in mind.

Aid Programme

91. **Dame Judith Hart** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes are proposed in the aid programme in the financial years 1984-85 and 1985-86.

Mr. Raison: For 1984-85 no changes in the aid programme are proposed. I shall shortly be making a statement regarding the position for 1985-86 following the announcement of the Government's expenditure plans.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Mr. Forth asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support the United States and other countries by withdrawing the United Kingdom contribution to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation if that organisation is not satisfactorily reformed and reconstituted.

Mr. Raison: I am currently reviewing our policy towards UNESCO. Over the last year Her Majesty's Government have sought reforms but not the reconstitution of UNESCO.

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he proposed before reaching a decision on the future of United Kingdom membership of UNESCO; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: I will take into consideration the views of hon. Members and of those Organisations and individuals who have written to me. It was agreed at the United Kingdom national commission for UNESCO on 5 November that it would make a further assessment of the desirability of Britain's continued membership in the light of the outcome of the next general conference in October 1985. I shall remain in close touch with those countries who share our concerns about the organisation.

Overseas Aid

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of gross national product is committed by the Government to overseas aid.

Mr. Raison: In 1983, 0·35 per cent. of gross national product was provided for official development assistance. This figure is very close to the average (0·36) for all countries comprising the development assistance committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the trend in real terms of expenditure on overseas aid in each of the next three years.

Mr. Raison: I shall shortly be making a statement on plans for the aid programme in 1985-86. For levels of aid in the two subsequent financial years the hon. Member must await the publication of the White Paper on public expenditure in February 1985.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is satisfied with the present level of assistance given by Her Majesty's Government in overseas aid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: The Government have a substantial overseas aid programme, and will continue to maintain one in the future.

Overseas Development Administration (Budget)

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what impact will be made upon the budget of the Overseas Development Administration by any grant of funds or food aid by the European Community to Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: Britain's share of overseas aid expenditure financed from the European Community budget is attributed to the public expenditure allocation for financing the United Kingdom aid programme. The United Kingdom share of the European Community's additional food and other emergency aid for Ethiopia, which has recently been approved, is some £2 million. The rate at which this EC allocation will be spent is uncertain so it is not yet known how much of it will count against the United Kingdom aid budget this financial year.

Colonial Service (Pensions)

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the cost of giving credit for years of war service to post-war entrants of the Colonial Service in computing their pensions.

Mr. Raison: A broad estimate is that the enhanced entitlements would cost about £3 million a year in 1983 values, assuming no retrospection. The once-for-all administration costs of implementing the concession would amount to some £200,000.

Bangladesh

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government have any plans to increase food aid to Bangladesh.

Mr. Raison: No. But we are continuing to monitor the situation closely.

Disaster Unit

Dame Judith Hart asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many trucks, Land Rovers and other vehicles were owned by the Overseas Development Administration for the use of its disaster unit on 3 May 1979.

Mr. Raison: 16 trucks, 41 Land Rovers and 2 Land Rover ambulances.

European Development Fund

Mr. John Hume asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why Her Majesty's Government have supported the proposal that seven billion European currency units should be the total financial package for the sixth European development fund; and why it has opposed the French proposal of 7·5 billion European currency units.

Mr. Raison: The Government believe that the agreed Community offer of 7 billion ecu is fair and generous.

Sudan

Mr. Burt asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received any request for aid from the Government of Sudan due to the current drought; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: The Sudan Government have appealed generally for drought relief aid. The Sudanese ambassador in London has asked specifically for help for refugees arriving in the country.

We are now shipping 11,750 tonnes of wheat flour which will be sold by the UN High Commission for Refugees to provide funds for its refugee programme there. We have also asked the high commissioner for a full report to allow us to consider the Sudan Government's latest request.

Much is being done by the voluntary agencies. I expect to approve within the next few days the allocation of £1 million over four years for a refugee agricultural development scheme in the eastern Sudan. We have just agreed to provide £100,000 to the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development for food transport and emergency feeding to support a Save the Children Fund nutrition team to help coordinate the feeding of new refugees and existing refugee camps; and to contribute to the cost of a logistics team from the same agency to help transport and distribute food in Kordofan and Darfur provinces. We shall continue to monitor the possible need for further help.

United Nations Environmental Programme

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what participation his Department will have, in the coming year, in the United Nations environment programme.

Mr. Raison: Co-ordination of British participation in the work of the United Nations environment programme is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office would expect to be represented on the British delegation to the governing council meeting in May and to participate in other UNEP activities throughout the year. In addition, through the aid programme, we support a wide range of projects and programmes designed to support the work of UNEP.

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Department's current involvement with the United Nations environment programme human settlements (habitat) project.

Mr. Raison: The United Kingdom is not a member of the United Nations centre for human settlements (habitat). The majority of the projects initiated by that organisation are funded by the United Nations development programme to which we make a considerable contribution. We are in touch with the United Nations centre for human settlements on the British contribution to the international year of shelter for the homeless, 1987.

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, when meeting his European Economic Community colleagues, he will encourage them now to lend, together with the United Kingdom, their full support to the desertification consultative group of the United Nations environment programme.

Mr. Raison: At the meeting of the Governing Council of the United Nations environment programme in May the United Kingdom, in close consultation with our Community partners, was instrumental in promoting a decision on desertification which, among other things, sought to strengthen the role of the consultative group on desertification control. The issue is now under discussion in the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made with the United Nations environment programme desertification project following the Sahelian conferences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: Following the United Nations conference on desertification in 1977, a plan of action to combat desertification was established. Progress in implementing the plan was reviewed by the governing council of the United Nations environment programme in Nairobi in May this year. It was agreed that the plan needed more focus on the most affected countries and that priority should be given to areas offering the best chances for substantial rehabilitation. The governing council called upon affected countries to establish national programmes to combat desertification and urged donors to increase their aid to such countries. The subsequent meeting in Dakar in July, called by the President of Senegal, reaffirmed this. The matter is now under discussion in the Second Committee of the United Nations General Assembly.

Food Aid

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a table of third world countries that have received food aid from the United Kingdom from 1980 to 1984 and the amount received by each.

Mr. Raison: The information requested is given in the following table. Statistics to the development assistance committee of the OECD are reported in US$ and presentation in this form provides a consistent picture of value.

Distribution of food aid
United Kingdom national actions

	1980		1981		1982		1983		1984 Shipments to end of Oct. 1984	1984 Other commitments 1984	
Recipient	*Cereals/ wheat equivalent metric tonnes (thousands)*	*Value $ thousands (including transport)*	*Cereals/ wheat equivalent metric tonnes (thousands)*	*Value $ thousands (including transport)*	*Cereals/ wheat equivalent metric tonnes (thousands)*	*Value $ thousands (including transport)*	*Cereals/ wheat equivalent metric tonnes (thousands)*	*Value $ thousands (including transport)*	*Cereals/ wheat equivalent metric tonnes (thousands)*	*Cereals/ wheat equivalent metric tonnes (thousands)*	*Value $ thousands (including transport)*
Multilateral											
UNHCR					8·5	842	17·00	3,155	22·8	13·5	
UNRWA					8·5	1,298					
Bilateral											
Afghan refugees (Pakistan)					10·35	6,775	8·50	1,948	8·50		
Algeria	1·0*	240									
Bangladesh			28·00	7,599			8·0	1,766			
Cape Verde	5·0	1,686									
Cambodia					3·50	623					
Cambodian refugees							2·27	472			
Congo	0·12	28	0·07	18							
Egypt	0·14	30	17·22	4,810							
Ethiopia	10·00	3,189							5·0	6·5	
Gambia					2·00	226					
Jordan	14·4	3,612	11·92	3,283							
Kenya			5·0	1,495	5·0	789					
Lebanon			0·78	217							
Mali			0·50	126	2·50	289	2·5	420	2·5		
Mauritania			2·54	681			3·0	774			
Morocco			11·00	3,012							
Mozambique	15·0	4,564	12·00	3,285			3·0	309	11·5	11·0	
Senegal					1·50	155					
Somalia	12·84	3,354	11·00	3,387							
Sudan							8·49	1,874			
Syria			2·57	606							
Tanzania					5·0	1,161					
Yemen PDRY	6·50	1,572	2·92	838							
Ghana										23·5	
Zambia	13·00	4,689	7·00	1,813							
Zimbabwe									10·0		
Balance										3·2	
Through WFP											
(a) regular programme											
Chad										8·8	
Ethiopia					37·0	8,220	19·00	4,729		15·0	
Egypt					2·74	582	13·50	2,965	2·53		
Morocco					9·23	1,960					
Lebanon					2·46	556					
Malawi					0·16	28					
Tunisia					5·00	712	8·50	2,033	10·00	6·9	
Syria							9·00	2,076	5·48	14·30	
Bangladesh									30·74		
Madagascar									0·685		
Equatorial Guinea									0·410		
Guinea									0·135		
Pakistan										5·0	
Balance										—	
(b) international emergency food reserve											
Mali							0·37	107			
Mauritania							4·50	1,324			
Zambia									3·5		
Uganda									1·495		
Balance										5·0	
Total	78·00	22,964 (£9·87m)	112·52	31,170 (£15·37m)	103·44	24,216 (£13·83m)	107·63	24,152 (£15·92m)	115·30	112·70	*27,300 (£21m)

* Estimate.

Acid Rain

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures are being taken by his Department to encourage the development of research projects based upon arid-resistant plant species; what measures are being taken to promote planting nurseries for such species; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: I will let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

SOCIAL SERVICES

National Insurance (Review)

Mr. Wood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has yet completed his review of national insurance contributions for 1985-86

Mr. Fowler: I have completed the annual review of national insurance contributions under section 120 of the Social Security Act 1975 and I have today laid two draft orders which require the approval of both Houses: the Social Security (Contributions, Re-rating) (No. 2) Order 1984 providing for contribution rates and profits limits to take effect from 6 April 1985, and the Social Security (Treasury Supplement to Contributions) (No. 2) Order, which provides for a reduction in the Treasury Supplement from 11 per cent. to 9 per cent. I have also laid the Social Security (Contributions) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1984, which set out new earnings limits for employees' and employers' contributions. A report by the Government Actuary (Cmnd. 9386) which accompanies the orders and regulations explains their effect on the National Insurance Fund.

Employees and Employers

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his statement today I do not propose to raise the rate of contribution for either employees or employers. However, in line with the requirements of the Social Security Pensions Act 1975, the lower earnings limit for Class 1 contributions is to be increased to £35·50 a week, just below the new basic retirement pension rate, and the upper earnings limit is to be raised to £265 a week, which is about 7·4 times the new basic pension rate. These new earnings limits replace the existing ones of £34 and £250 a week respectively. The effects of these changes are as follows.

Not Contracted-out Employees

Neither the employee nor his employer will have to pay a contribution if his earnings are less than £35·50 a week. For people earning between £35·50 and £250 (the old upper limit) there will be no increase for either the employee or the employer. For those with earnings between £250 and £265 (the new upper limit) the maximum increase will be £1·35 a week for the employee and £1·57 for the employer.

Contracted-out Employees

Contributions payable by contracted-out employees and their employers will rise slightly. Where earnings are less than £250 the increase will be very small, reflecting the fact that the increase in the lower earnings limit reduces the band of earnings on which the lower contracted-out rate is paid; the increase on earnings between £35·50 and £250 will generally be 3p for the employee and 6p for the employer. Additional contributions will be payable on earnings between £250 and £265 (the new upper limit); the maximum increase will be £1·05 for the employee and £1·01 for the employer.

The self-employed

The flat-rate class 2 contribution will be raised to £4·75. Strict application of the formula for calculating self-employed contributions which has operated since 1977 would have meant a class 2 rate of £5·05 but I have thought it right to continue — and indeed increase — the modest relief to the small businessman while remaining within the broad framework of the formula. The rate of the class 4 contribution is not being increased and the annual limits of profits between which class 4 contributions are paid are being raised from £3,950 and £13,000 to £4,150 and £13,780 respectively.

The effect of these changes is that for self-employed people who only pay class 2 contributions there will be an annual increase of £7·80 but for those with profits between £4,150 and £13,000 there will be a reduction of £4·80 a year, assuming the same level of profits as in 1984-85. For those with profits of or above £13,780, the new upper profits limit, the increase will be £44·34 a year.

Class 3 (Voluntary) Contributions

The rate of class 3 contributions is to be raised from £4·50 to £4·65.

Rate of Treasury Supplement

The Treasury supplement to the national insurance fund is being reduced from 11 per cent. to 9 per cent. In recent years the consolidated fund has been meeting an increasing share of social security expenditure.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Synthetic Resins Ltd, Liverpool

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has had any consultations with Scott Bader about the proposed closure of Synthetic Resins Ltd in Liverpool

Mr. Trippier: No, but officials from the Merseyside office of my Department have discussed the matter with the local management.

Alvey Programme

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied that the United States Government will not seek to enforce their Export Administration Act over products and expertise arising from projects under the Alvey programme in which United States controlled companies have participated or may participate.

Mr. Channon: Contracts and grants under the Alvey programme are for research carried out in the United Kingdom. As a matter of United Kingdom law, United States export controls have no force in the United Kingdom and Her Majesty's Government will continue to resist attempts by the United States Administration to apply their controls within the United Kingdom.

Fireworks

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consideration the Government are giving to a review of fireworks controls; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher It is the Government's intention to revise the legislation so that magistrates can impose heavier penalties for selling fireworks to young people under 16 and for letting them off in a public place. As things stand I am not convinced of the need for further controls but I will keep the situation under review.

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if Her Majesty's Government have any plans to prohibit the sale of fireworks to the general public.

Mr. Fletcher: Family firework parties are a traditional British institution enjoyed by millions, and as things stand I am not prepared to deny people this pleasure because of abuse or carelessness by a few. However I will keep this situation under review.

European Community (Research Council)

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress was made at the meeting of the Research Council of European Community Ministers on 6 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: The Community's Council of Ministers (Research) met on 6 November 1984 in Brussels; I represented Her Majesty's Government. The Council held

a constructive exchange of views on the approach it would adopt to the various proposals for research programmes currently under discussion, given the present budgetary and financial constraints in the Community. The specific research proposals were not discussed individually, but the Council will return to them, following detailed work by the Presidency and the Commission, at its next meeting in December.

Toys (Safety)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will consider including crossbows, powerful catapults and other potentially dangerous toys in the review of regulations on framing new safety guidelines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: Certainly. That part of British Standard BS 5665, Safety of Toys, which sets requirements for toy guns also covers other projectile toys such as crossbows, pea-shooters and darts. There is a possible grey area between projectile toys and sporting equipment. My officials, in conjunction with other Departments as necessary, are reviewing all aspects of current legal requirements and published standards for these products and will seek improvements where appropriate.

Chatsworth Collection (Export Licences)

Mr. Faulds asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will state *(a)* the total number of export licences actually issued in respect of 61 drawings sold at auction on 3 July from the Chatsworth collection, together with the total value applicable to them and *(b)* the total number of items for which export licences have been temporarily withheld, together with the total value applicable to them.

Mr. Channon: Licences have been temporarily withheld, on the advice of the reviewing committee on the export of works of art, for 13 items having a total value of £13,360,480. Licences for the remaining items have been issued in normal course. The value of these items is a matter of commercial confidentiality.

Nationalised Industries (Consumer Councils)

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he plans to introduce reforms to the constitution of nationalised industries consumer councils.

Mr. Fletcher: In 1982 my Department published a paper entitled "The Nationalised Industry Consumer Councils: A Strategy for Reform", outlining the Government's intentions for improvements in the structure and organisation of such councils. A number of the proposals in that document have already been implemented and action on others is in hand.

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to require the nationalised industries to engage in consultation with the consumer councils covering their industries, as the councils demand.

Mr. Fletcher: The nationalised industries do already consult their respective consumer councils on a range of issues. The consumer councils will be reviewing their consultative arrangements with their industries in agreeing the operating guidelines foreshadowed in paragraphs 19-20 of the "Strategy for Reform" paper.

Radio Investigation Service

Mr. Onslow asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he intends to increase the staff of the radio investigation service.

Mr. Butcher: I will reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Spain (Motor Vehicles)

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about new Government initiatives to introduce fair competition and an equalisation of tariffs in motor vehicle exports to, and imports from, Spain.

Mr. Channon: The key to fair competition in trade in motor vehicles with Spain lies in her negotiations for entry into the European Community. The Community has now made its position clear. Under pressure from Her Majesty's Government it calls for special provision for tariffs on cars to secure a substantial improvement for entry into the Spanish market as from accession.

Price Waterhouse and Deloitte Haskins and Sells (Merger)

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer the proposed merger between Price Waterhouse and Deloitte Haskins and Sells to the Office of Fair Trading under the Restrictive Practices and Monopolies and Mergers Acts.

Mr. Fletcher: This proposed merger is under consideration by the Office of Fair Trading. In accordance with the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973, my right hon. Friend will decide in the light of advice from the Director General of Fair Trading whether to refer it to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has had from the senior partner of Price Waterhouse about its proposed merger with Deloitte Haskins and Sells.

Mr. Fletcher: Representations made to the Secretary of State regarding mergers are confidential.

Cash Limits

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what changes have been made in the cash limit which is to be applied in the current financial year to the provision under class IV, vote 6, Scientific and Technological Assistance (Department of Trade and Industry).

Mr. Pattie: The outturn on this Vote for 1983-84 showed expenditure of £211,000 in excess of that year's cash limit. The overspend arose as a result of shortcomings in the day-to-day operation of financial control systems, which are now being improved. In accordance with normal practice, the cash limit on this Vote for this financial year will now be reduced by the amount of the previous year's overspend. The new cash limit will therefore be reduced by £211,000 from £378,178,000 to £377,967,000.

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any changes to announce in the cash limit for class IV, vote 2, covering miscellaneous support services.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I propose to reduce the cash limit for class IV, vote 2 by £1,467,000 from £87,195,000 to £85,728,000. The reduction will be used to offset in part the overspend on regional and selective assistance on class IV vote 1.

Strategic Minerals (Stockpile)

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether it is the Government's intention to continue maintaining a stockpile of strategic minerals.

Mr. Trippier: The Government have decided that it is no longer necessary to hold a mineral stockpile and will be disposing of it over the next few years.

Research and Development

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is satisfied that enough is being done to encourage more private sector resources to be devoted to research and development.

Mr. Pattie: The Government place considerable emphasis on the need to encourage industrial research and development and has taken practical steps to support it. The number of research and development projects approved for assistance under the Science and Technology Act increased from 356 in 1979-80 to 1612 in 1983-84. The funds allocated for general industrial research and development support grew from £60 million to £200 million over the same period.

Our measures have had a significant and widespread impact. Industry now better appreciates the importance of research and development for its future viability. This together with the improvement over the last three years in profitability and liquidity in industry and commerce has resulted in increased demand for Government support for research and development. In consequence the 1985-86 allocation for innovation grants is now virtually committed.

In view of this I have decided to review the balance of the Department's support for industrial research and development. Whilst this is being undertaken and with immediate effect no further application will be accepted for:

research and development projects from individual firms on standard support for innovation terms

development and investment projects under the microelectronics industry support scheme and the fibre-optics and opto-electronics scheme and

application, development and installation projects for flexible manufacturing systems and robots.

Formal applications that have already been received by the Department will be processed within the limited funds still available.

The review will be completed within five months. I will announce the conclusions at that time. That will also be the occasion for introducing the new arrangements for regrouping all the Department's assistance schemes announced by my right hon. Friend on 27 July.

Minerals (Green Book)

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Green Book on minerals is expected to be published.

Mr. Macfarlane: I have been asked to reply.

Consultation on all chapters of the draft new edition of the Green Book (including the policy chapter) has now been completed. Its publication remains dependent on the making of regulations for the abatement of compensation under the Town and Country Planning (Minerals) Act 1981 and the introduction of minerals amendments to the General Development Order 1977. I hope that both these items of legislation can be successfully concluded within the current parliamentary Session. The new edition of the Green Book will be published as soon as possible thereafter.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Cable Infrastructure (Capital Allowances)

Mr. Skeet asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will amend chapter II of the Finance Act 1984 to provide further capital allowances for the establishment of a cable infrastructure in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Moore: The capital allowance system has been reformed, amongst other reasons, to reduce discrimination between different assets and different sectors of the economy. My hon. Friend's proposal would not be consistent with that objective.

Alcoholic Drinks (Taxes and Duties)

Mr. Colvin asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the amount of revenue raised from taxes and duties on alcoholic drinks in the fiscal year 1983-84.

Mr. Hayhoe: Net receipts of excise duty on alcoholic drinks in 1983-84 were £4,075 million. It is estimated that VAT on alcoholic drinks yielded about £1,750 million.

Tax Revenue

Mr. Mudd asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report (a)* the revenue received in 1983-84, and *(b)* the latest estimates of revenue to be received in 1984-85 from the following taxes (i) fuel duty on petrol and derv sales, (ii) vehicle excise duty, (iii) car tax, (iv) value added tax on petrol and derv sales, and (v) value added tax on sales of vehicles.

Mr. Hayhoe: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on 11 July to my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith).

Value Added Tax

Mr. Best asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue in a full year from the imposition of value added tax at the standard rate on each of *(a)* children's clothing, *(b)* children's shoes, *(c)* fuel, *(d)* all food currently zero-rated, *(e)* books and *(f)* newspapers and periodicals.

Mr. Hayhoe: It is estimated that the net additional full year revenue, at 1984-85 prices, would be about:

		£ million
(a)	Children's clothing	200
(b)	Children's footwear	50
(c)	Fuel	1,350
(d)	Food	3,500
(e)	Books	85
(f)	Newspapers and periodicals	290

Mr. Best asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect in a full year *(a)* on the increase of the retail price index and *(b)* on consequent increase in

payment of benefits of the imposition of value added tax at the standard rate on: (i) books and (ii) newspapers and periodicals.

Mr. Hayhoe: The impact effect on the RPI is estimated to be less than 0·1 per cent. for books, and about 0·2 per cent. for newspapers and periodicals.

Each 1 per cent. increase in social security benefit rates is estimated to cost about £350 million in a full year.

Mr. Adley asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representation he has received about value added tax on books; and what support he expects for such a proposal.

Mr. Hayhoe: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 22 October 1984 to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) at column *464*. I cannot usefully comment on the degree of public support such a proposal might or might not receive, but the many representations on this subject have been carefully noted.

Mr. Corbett asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the amount of value added tax paid since 1 May to the latest convenient date in respect of hot food and drink purchased from take-aways.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 November 1984, c. *18*]: Value added tax paid in respect of hot take-away food and drink is not separately identified in Customs and Excise accounts. Estimates of the amounts paid have to be based on consumer expenditure data, and information on expenditure after the Budget change will not be available for some time. I have no reason to depart from the estimates given in footnote (aa) to table 4.2 of this year's Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Inflation

Mr. Proctor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current rate of inflation; and if he will make a statement on his policies to reduce it.

Mr. Peter Rees: The retail price index rose 4·7 per cent. in the 12 months to September. The Government intend to maintain the financial discipline necessary to reduce inflation further.

European Community (Own Resources Payments)

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about an advance of own resources payments to the European Communities in October.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Commission has, in accordance with article 10(2) of Council Regulation 2891/77, invited member states to advance from 20 December to 20 November payments of own resources other than VAT in respect of agricultural, sugar and isoglucose levies and customs duties collected by the Government on their behalf in October. The Government are complying with this request. This advance follows the previous one from 20 November to 22 October which was announced to the House on 22 October (WA 467-468).

The advance will reduce the Commission's cash flow difficulties and enable the Commission to pay from the budget to recipients in the United Kingdom and other member states.

Pending parliamentary approval of a Winter Supplementary Estimate, payment of £130 million will be made by a repayable advance from the contingencies fund. The payment of levies and duties on 20 December 1984 which is made directly from the consolidated fund under section 2(3) of the European Communities Act 1972 will be reduced by the amount of the advance. There will therefore be no net addition to public expenditure.

Any further requests for advances will be considered in the light of the then prevailing circumstances.

Fontainebleau Agreement

Mr. Marlow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the detailed conditions necessary to satisfy the financial mechanisms required by the Government arising from the Fontainebleau agreement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Pension Funds (Withdrawals)

Mr. Winnick asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is intended to make lump sum withdrawals from pension funds subject to tax at retirement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I am aware of the recent speculation on this subject. Our normal policy is not to comment on such speculation.

"Official Report"

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement as to the reasons for the delay in publication of the bound copies of the *Official Report*, sixth series.

Mr. Hayhoe: I understand that a change in the system for compiling indexes led to a serious delay in the delivery of copy to Her Majesty's Stationery Office. However, volume 52 is due to be published on 7 December. Officials of the House and HMSO are urgently considering how best to improve the position.

Funding

Mr. Gould asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the extent of overfunding or underfunding for each quarter since the beginning of 1982; what have been the total sales of commercial bills for each quarter over the same period; and what has been the sterling index, the level of industrial production and the level of real wages for each quarter over the same period.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

National Health Service

Mr. Coombs asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will announce revised cash limits for the National Health Service for 1984-85 to take account of the pay awards to staff who are not covered by the pay review bodies.

Mr. Peter Rees: Yes. As announced on 17 October by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services cash limits for the NHS will be increased to take

account of part of the increased cost arising from these pay awards. Part of the additional cost will be found from efficiency savings within the service. The balance will be charged to the Reserve and has been taken into account in the estimated outturn of the public expenditure planning total for 1984-85 given in the autumn statement on 12 November 1984. The changes, which, for the voted cash limits, are subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, are as follows:

Department	*Vote/cash block*	*Current cash limit*	*Increase for pay*	*Other changes*	*Revised cash limit*
		'000s	'000s	'000s	'000s
Department of Health and Social Security	XI. 1	8,962,607	29,370	—	8,991,977
Scottish Office	XV. 14	1,448,719	3,850	—	1,452,569
Welsh Office	XVI. 1	752,144	1,943	*−2,025	752,062
		£ million	£ million	£ million	£ million
Northern Ireland Departments	NID 1	†2,059·5	†1·3	††1·7	†2,062·5

* This reduction results from savings found on the roads and transport programme and offsets overspend on selective financial assistance on class XVI vote 3.

† Figures for Northern Ireland are rounded to the nearest £0·1 million.

‡ Details of the expenditure made available for the Milk supplementary levy (outgoers) scheme are given by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in a written answer of today's date.

CIVIL SERVICE

Video Display Units

Mr. Skinner asked the Minister for the Civil Service whether he will now publish the results of the Civil Service Medical Advisory Service's research into the dangers of video display units to pregnant women operators.

Mr. Hayhoe: The Civil Service Medical Advisory Service will be presenting the report of a survey of visual display unit operators in Runcorn to the international meeting on allegations of reproductive hazards from visual display units organised by Humane Technology, an independent specialist consultancy, in London on 29-30 November 1984.

The report and ensuing discussion will be published after the meeting.

ENERGY

Electricity Costs

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the extra cost per unit of producing electricity by burning oil in the power stations compared with the cost in those stations which are using coal.

Mr. Goodlad: The additional cost of generating electricity from oil-fired power stations as a result of the coal dispute varies according to the overall level of demand on the system at a given time and other factors. The extra costs cannot be fully assessed until the dispute is over.

Coal Prices

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for Germany, France, Belgium and Holland such information as he has as to the latest available figures showing the price of coal, the amount of subsidy per tonne, and the estimated cost of producing each tonne: and if he will compare this with the United Kingdom coal industry.

Mr. David Hunt: No recent comparative information is available. It has been announced that France intends to halve its coal industry over the next five years and to reduce employment in its coal industry by the same proportion.

The last set of comparative figures which are available relate to 1982. At that time the investment finance available to the coal industry in the United Kingdom was £736 million, compared with £231 million in the Federal Republic of Germany, £47 million in France and £19 million in Belgium.

Doubtless due to this heavy investment, production costs in Britain were lower than in the other countries. Production costs per tonne were £47 in the United Kingdom, £51·50 in Germany, £54·30 in France and £53·90 in Belgium. Production subsidies were provided by each country to bring their production costs into line with the prices at which their coal could be sol . In 1982 the revenue received per tonne was £38·10 in the United Kingdom, £37·50 in France, £39·20 in Belgium and £45·40 in the Federal Republic of Germany.

There is no doubt that, in the period since 1982, the massive gap between the investment finance provided by Britain and by other European countries has further widened, and the British investment programme in coal will have been more than double the investment made by the rest of the European Community put together.

Nuclear Power Stations (Protection)

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether Her Majesty's Government require nuclear power stations in the United Kingdom to be designed to withstand direct hits on the reactor core from all known aerial bombs and high-explosive missiles.

Mr. Goodlad: It is not a formal requirement for nuclear power stations in the United Kingdom to be required to withstand bombardment from all known aerial bombs and high-explosive missiles. However the general safety requirement for protection against external hazards is such as to give a considerable degree of protection against weapons. The reactor core itself is extremely well-protected by steel and concrete structures but there is no guarantee that it would not be damaged by a nuclear weapon. As my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State at the Home Office explained to the House on 24

November 1982 at column *494* a direct hit by a nuclear weapon on a nuclear installation would cause no significant enhancement of blast, heat, or initial radiation.

NCB (Deficit Grant Payment)

Mr. Lester asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make a statement about authority for deficit grant payments to the National Coal Board.

Mr. Peter Walker: The present provision in Estimates approved by this House for deficit payments to the NCB during 1984-85 is £795 million. This provision was based on the deficit in 1984-85 foreseen before the strike, plus the outstanding element of the deficit in 1983-84.

The summer Supplementary Estimate for NCB deficit grant contained a footnote explaining that payment of the full amount in the Estimate required an order under Section 3(4) of the Coal Industry Act 1980 increasing the aggregate amount of deficit grant authorised under the Act. I am laying such an order before the House in draft today.

The Government also intend to present a winter Supplementary Estimate for a further £607 million of deficit grant within the proposed new ceiling of £2,000 million.

Cash Limits

Mr. Andrew MacKay asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give details of any changes to his Department's cash limit.

Mr. Peter Walker: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit of class IV, vote 5 will be increased by £45 million to £142,869,000.

That increase represents provision for a grant to the British National Oil Corporation the reasons for which were explained in the minute which my Department laid before the House on 23 October.

The increase of £45 million in BNOC's external financing requirement will be charged to the reserve and has been taken into account in the estimated outturn for the total of public expenditure for 1984-85 given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his autumn statement on 12 November 1984. The corporation's external financing requirement for 1984-85 is revised from minus £4 million to £41 million.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the latest figure for youth unemployment in the Liverpool travel-to-work area;

(2) what are the latest figures for female unemployment in the Liverpool travel-to-work area;

(3) what are the latest figures for male unemployment in the Liverpool travel-to-work area.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested for the new travel-to-work area will become available next year. Corresponding data for the old Liverpool travel-to-work area are available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the percentage of unemployment among blind people of working age, namely, men under 65 years and women under 60 years.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is not available.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the number of those aged under 20 years who were unemployed in *(a)* the county of Lancashire and *(b)* the borough of Burnley in May 1979 and at the latest available date; and what is the percentage increase.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information on the age of claimant unemployed in administrative districts and counties will become available next year. Corresponding data for the old travel-to-work areas in the county of Lancashire are available in the House of Commons Library. The figures for 1979 are not directly comparable with current statistics because of the October 1982 change in the basis of the count.

Manufacturing Industries

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of people employed in United Kingdom manufacturing industries now as compared to the same date in 1983.

Mr. Alan Clark: The latest estimate is for June 1984, when the number of employees in employment in manufacturing industries in the United Kingdom was 5,581,700. The corresponding number in June 1983 was 5,641,200.

Welwyn Hatfield Constituency

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will reconsider the inclusion of the Welwyn Hatfield constituency in the revised travel-to-work area of Luton and Watford; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: No. The Welwyn Hatfield constituency, with the exception of the Wheathampstead ward, which is in the Watford and Luton travel-to-work area, forms part of the Hertford and Harlow travel-to-work area. The relevant travel-to-work area boundary is based on an analysis of the travel to work patternsn shown by the 1981 census of population as described in a supplement published with the September edition of *Employment Gazette*, a copy of which is in the Library.

The census data show that the part of the constituency which is in the Hertford and Harlow travel-to-work area has more work journeys to or from the rest of that travel-to-work area than to or from the Watford and Luton travel-to-work area. The same source shows that there are more journeys between Wheathampstead and the rest of the Watford and Luton travel-to-work area than between Wheathampstead and the Hertford and harlow travel-to-work area.

Textile Firms (Inspectors)

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many extra factory and wages inspectors will be hired to undertake the extra visits to the premises of textile firms recently announced by his Department.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The special inspection initiative concerning textile and clothing factories in the west

Midlands, Leicester and East London, announced on September 10, is being undertaken by existing staff. Allocation of inspectors to particular blocks of work is dealt with flexibly in response to changing needs and staff are not in general recruited for specific purposes such as this campaign.

Video Display Units

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will now undertake a comprehensive study into the possible health hazards to operators of video display units; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Health and Safety Executive has published a research paper on the human aspects of visual display units and a guidance book. Both publications consider health aspects. The executive is currently preparing a pamphlet for operators which will deal with health aspects, including those relating to women in pregnancy.

The executive is also monitoring the progress of a number of current studies into the possible health effects of using VDUs. The possibility of funding further research is being considered.

Ault and Wiborg Paint Factory, Perivale

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Employment if the Health and Safety Executive is satisfied with the current and proposed standards of health and safety at the Ault and Wiborg paint factory in Perivale; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am advised that the Health and Safety Executive is actively discussing health and safety standards with the management at this factory. I am satisfied that steps are being taken to ensure that the standards are acceptable.

Wages

Mr. Evans asked the Secretary of State for Employment if, in respect of the consultations he is to carry out in respect of proposals for the protection of wages legislation, he will list the organisations and individuals that responded to the original consultative document, indicating *(a)* those who broadly supported repeal of the existing right of manual workers to be paid in cash and *(b)* those expressing concern about malpractice in respect of deductions from pay.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department received over 100 letters from organisations of employers and workers, and from other bodies, in response to the original consultative document issued in March 1983. Of the five options put forward in the paper, a substantial majority of respondents favoured repeal of the Truck Acts with the enactment of up-to-date legislation to protect workers from arbitrary deductions from wages. Those views were taken into account when preparing the more detailed legislative proposals concerning deductions from pay issued for consultation on 31 October.

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report* details of the legislative and administrative measures which have been adopted by the other member states of the European Community for the implementation of their obligations relating to low pay and minimum wages under the convention of the International Labour Organisation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In addition to the United Kingdom the following member states of the European Community have ratified international labour convention No. 26 concerning the creation of minimum wage fixing machinery — Belgium, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Details of the legislative and administrative measures used to apply the convention in individual member states are not readily available, without disproportionate cost.

Newham (Training)

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many men and women, listed separately, are on special employment or training measures in *(a)* the London borough of Newham and *(b)* the Constituency of Newham, North-East.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Some 3,200 people are benefiting from the employment and training measures in the London borough of Newham, although because of the various bases on which local information is collated, an unknown proportion will be in areas outside the borough and the hon. Member's constituency. I am unable to provide a separate number for men and women on these measures in the borough without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Leighton asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people left school last September in the London borough of Newham; how many ment on to further education; how many got jobs; how many went on to youth training schemes; and how many are unemployed.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Available statistics from the Newham careers service shows that 2,312 16-year-olds left school in the London borough of Newham in the academic year ending 31 August 1984. The other information requested will not be available until a survey by the careers service to establish the destinations of these school leavers is completed in December.

Agricultural Workers (Fatalities and Injuries)

Viscount Cranborne asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many agricultural workers have been killed and injured through contact with overhead power cables in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: During 1983 seven agricultural workers were injured through contact with overhead power cables, none of them fatally.

Race Relations Act 1976

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Employment when he plans to introduce legislation to amend the Race Relations Act 1976 in respect of the code of practice for the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity in employment, published by the Commission for Racial Equality.

Mr. Alan Clark: It remains our intention to amend section 47 of the Race Relations Act to enable the

Secretary of State to amend codes of practice before their presentation to Parliament for approval. My right hon. Friend will make an announcement in due course.

Careers Advice

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the current level of careers advice available in secondary schools.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The provision of careers advice in secondary schools is the responsibility of local education authorities. If the hon. Member knows of any particular problems I and my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, would be pleased to hear from him.

Average Wage

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current national average wage.

Mr. Alan Clark: The latest figures on the average earnings of full time adult employees working a full week relate to April 1984 and are given in table 1 of "New Earnings Survey", 1984 part A, a copy of which is in the Library.

European Social Fund (Fife)

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals for schemes have been submitted by his Department in the last three months on behalf of Fife regional council for consideration for support under the European social fund; what is the potential number of young people who may benefit from these schemes; and when he expects a determination of these applications.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The deadline for the submission of 1985 applications to the European social fund was 22 October. The Department submitted 10 applications for support under the fund on behalf of Fife regional council. They are listed below:

	Number of Beneficiaries
Schemes for young people aged under 25:	
Employment subsidy scheme	225
Business training for young people	24
Preliminary training for handicapped young people	45
Vocational training for handicapped young people	24
Training in Levenmouth enterprise centre	60
Total	378
Schemes for adults aged over 25:	
Employment subsidy scheme	175
Enterprise training for small and medium-sized firms	48
Preliminary vocational training for women	48
Vocational training fkor women	48
Training in Levenmouth enterprise centre	40
Total	359

The European Commission's decisions on 1985 applications are expected next March.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) why unemployment benefits are being denied to persons who are out of work as a consequence of the coal mining dispute and are not directly involved in the strike; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many persons in Barnsley and district are employed by AMCO Industrial Holdings Ltd. are being denied unemployment benefits because they have been laid off as a result of the coal mining dispute; by what statutory powers these payments are being denied; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The benefit entitlement of someone who loses employment as a result of a trade dispute is governed by section 19 of the Social Security Act 1975. Decisions on claims are made by the independent adjudicating authorities.

A total of 238 people in Barnsley and district employed by AMCO Industrial Holdings have been disqualified from receiving benefit.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) excluding those employees who represent the additionality factor in mode A of the youth training scheme, what is the latest figure for the numbers and percentages of youth training scheme trainees in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Great Britain who have secured permanent employment;

(2) what proportion of youth training scheme entrants who have completed a full year's traning *(a)* secure regular work and *(b)* are unemployed in (i) Scotland and (ii) Great Britain.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Detailed comprehensive information on the destinations of youngsters leaving the youth training scheme is not available. However, a recent sample survey showed that 58 per cent. of those leavers responding went into employment and a further 13 per cent. either went into or intended to go into further training or education. A copy of the paper containing the detailed results of this sample survey has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will describe the basis on which he calculates that 70 per cent. or more of youth trainees have secured work or further training, and provide the total figures on which this calculation is based.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The latest calculations on the destinations of youth training scheme leavers are based on the paper entitled "YTS Leavers", a copy of which has been placed in the Library. This paper includes a breakdown of the various destinations of leavers obtained from the recent sample survey of 3,500 young people in nine Manpower Services Commission areas who left individual programmes within the youth training scheme between 1 April and 31 July. The survey showed that 58 per cent. of the young people were in work and that a further 13 per cent. were in, or intending to go into, further training or education.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it a condition of renewal of the youth training scheme that the sponsors observe equal opportunity policies.

Mr. Peter Morrison: All contracts between the Manpower Services Commission and managing agents and sponsors include a clause requiring them to observe equal opportunities policy. Youngsters on the youth training scheme are covered by the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 in respect of recruitment to, and termination from, the youth training scheme.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will ask the Manpower Services Commission to make full use of the Commission for Racial Equality and local community relations councils when implementing equal opportunity policy in the youth training scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Manpower Services Commission will continue to use the Commission for Racial Equality and the local community relations councils as a source of advice, and guidance will be issued to managing agents and sponsors who participate in the youth training scheme to recognise this source of advice in implementing equal opportunities.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what steps he will take to see that the recommendations given by University of Bristol staff to the Manpower Services Commission are put into effect with respect to equal opportunities and the youth training scheme;

(2) whether he has considered the report on ethnic minorities and the youth training scheme prepared by Bristol university staff for the Manpower Services Commission.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I understand that the report is presently under consideration by the Manpower Services Commission.

Work Permits

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many work permits were issued in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983, respectively.

Mr. Alan Clark: The number of work permits issued in the years 1979 to 1983 were as follows:

Year	*Employment expected to last 11 months or more*	*Employment expected to last less than 11 months*	*Total*
1979	8,344	9,649	17,993
1980	6,423	8,238	14,661
1981	5,780	6,983	12,763
1982	5,569	7,328	12,897
1983	5,818	7,728	13,546

Information Technology Centres

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has recently received on the funding of information technology centres.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I have not recently received any representations which directly concern the general basis on which information technology centres are funded.

Employment and Training Act 1973

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce legislation to govern the form of directions given under the Employment and Training Act 1973.

Mr. Tom King: No.

Manpower Services Commission (Racial Discrimination)

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what further measures he is planning to eliminate racial discrimination from all aspects of the operation of Manpower Services Commission schemes in the light of the recent report by the Commission for Racial Equality and the report by Bristol university staff prepared on behalf of the Manpower Services Commission.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I understand that both reports are currently under consideration by the Manpower Services Commission.

Area Manpower Boards

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to increase minority representation on area manpower boards.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Redundancy Payments

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is now the average statutory redundancy payment; and what proportion of it is met from the redundancy fund.

Mr. Tom King: In the period April to September this year the average payment was £1,500. The redundancy fund pays a rebate of 41 per cent. to employers. I shall be introducing an order later in the Session to reduce that rebate to 35 per cent. as from next April.

Training Loans

Mr. Chapman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what progress he has made on the proposals on training loans in the White Paper "Training for Jobs".

Mr. Tom King: In the White Paper "Training for Jobs" we announced our intention of examining the possibility of introducing a scheme of loans for adult trainees who want to undertake training of their own choice. I am today publishing a consultative paper on training loans which sets out our view of how an experimental scheme might operate. Copies of the consultative paper are available in the Vote Office.

Community Programme

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of women employed on the Manpower Services Commission's community programme; what percentage of the total community programme work force are women; and, of these, how many were in receipt of benefit before joining the scheme.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 November 1984, c. 28]: Information is collected

monthly about entrants to the community programme. Over the 12 months up to 28 September, 23 per cent. of entrants were woman; a total of 34,450. Over 85 per cent. of entrants were themselves in receipt of benefit immediately before joining the programme and, on the basis of a sample survey of participants in October 1983, just over half of those not receiving benefits directly would be women. However, some would be indirect recipients and in the rule changes to the programme which came into effect on 1 October, we provided that where unemployment or supplementary benefit is claimed by the head of the household and includes an element of payment for an unemployed spouse, that spouse will be regarded as a benefit recipient for the purposes of eligibility.

NORTHERN IRELAND

National Health Service

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were employed in the National Health Service in the Province at the latest date; what were the figures for June 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: Health and personal social services are fully integrated in Northern Ireland and the total number of staff employed at the relevant dates were:—
30 June 1979—60,606 (44,545 whole-time equivalent)
30 September 1984 — 67,001 (49,207 whole-time equivalent)

Doctors

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many doctors were employed in the National Health Service in the Province at the latest date; what were the figures for June 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information is as follows:—
September 1984—1,880
June 1979—1,730
These figures include doctors working in the hospital service and in community health and community medicine and some general practitioners who undertake part-time community health or hospital work. General practitioners are independent contractors and therefore are not included in these figures unless they also hold part-time hospital or community health appointments.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many doctors were unemployed in the Province at the latest available date: and what the comparable figures were for June 1979.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information requested is not available.

Driving Licences

Mr. McCusker asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many driving licences issued by the Department of the Environment (N.I.) are currently in use in the Province.

Mr. Chris Patten: A total of 574,158 persons currently hold a full Northern Ireland driving licence; 73,476 hold a provisional driving licence.

Voluntary Schools

Mr. McCusker asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much land has been vested on behalf of voluntary schools under article 10 of the Northern Ireland Education Order 1978; and whether any such scheme is presently under consideration.

Mr. Scott: No land has been vested and no proposals are at present under consideration.

TRANSPORT

Manchester Airport

14. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about progress towards a rail link to Manchester international airport.

Mr. David Mitchell: I understand British Rail and the Manchester International Airport Authority are awaiting the results of further evaluation studies before deciding whether to pursue the project further.

London (Dial-a-Ride)

17. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what discussion he has had with London borough councils as to the future of the dial-a-ride service.

Mrs. Chalker: My Department is holding discussions now with representatives of the London boroughs about future arrangements for funding dial-a-ride and other services for disabled people.

M65 Motorway

19. **Mr. Straw** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in appointing the consultants in respect of the Blackburn/M6-M61 section of the M65 motorway; and when they are expected to report.

Mrs. Chalker: Messrs. Howard Humphreys and Partners have been appointed as consulting engineers and were given details of their commission last month. We have asked them to prepare a detailed report on all aspects of the new all-purpose road south of Blackburn within 12 months so that we can then take decisions about the preferred route.

Transport Supplementary Grant

20. **Mr. Gould** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with the passenger transport executives concerning the proposed changes in allocation of transport supplementary grant under section 20 of the Transport Act 1968.

Mr. Ridley: None, TSG is not paid to PTEs, but to metropolitan county councils and the GLC (as well as to shire counties). I refer to my reply to the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell) earlier this afternoon—I consulted the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, among others.

41. **Mr. Craigen** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how much was spent on section 20 grants within the transport supplementary grant in the financial year 1984-85.

Mrs. Chalker: In the 1984-85 transport supplementary grant settlement for England my right hon. Friend accepted £53·4 million of metropolitan county councils' estimated expenditure on support for local rail services. Because TSG is a block grant, it is not possible to identify any part of it with support paid by the metropolitan county councils to PTEs for local rail services.

59. **Mr. Conlan** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the effect of the withdrawal of transport supplementary grant from certain classes of capital expenditure, such as car parks and many local roads on the feasibility of financing such expenditure.

Mrs. Chalker: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary order, capital expenditure on many major road schemes will be supported with transport supplementary grant at the rate of 50 per cent. in 1985-86—this should go a long way towards financing the most expensive items in local authorities' highways capital programmes. Authorities have always financed the larger part of their transport capital expenditure themselves with the help of the rate support grant and there is no reason why they should not continue to finance comprehensive highways capital programmes within the resources available to them.

Motorways (Speed Limits)

21. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will consider raising the speed limit for cars using Britain's motorways.

29. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the speed limits on motorways.

Mrs. Chalker: A review of the national motorway speed limit was carried out this year. We concluded that the limit should remain at 70 mph. It would be premature to review the matter again so soon.

West Midlands (Northern Relief Route)

23. **Mr. Maude** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce a decision on the suggested northern relief route for the west midlands.

Mrs. Chalker: I hope that the choice of preferred route following the public consultation will be announced early next year.

Railways (Electrification)

25. **Dr. Mawhinney** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest estimated cost of electrifying the east coast main line.

Mr. David Mitchell: The electrification of the east coast main line was approved at a cost of £306 million at 1983 fourth quarter prices. British Rail does not expect the cost to exceed this figure but it does have to find the money from within its own resources.

53. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to increase resources available to British Rail to enable the board to electrify lines between Manchester, Liverpool, Preston and Blackpool.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Government are ready to approve worthwhile investments which offer a sound prospect for improving the financial performance of the railways. However, it is for BR to decide its investment priorities and whether to bring forward specific schemes. It has made no proposals to me for the schemes mentioned by the hon. Member.

Dr. Twinn asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now announce his decision on electrification of the North London line.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have now written to the chairman of British Rail giving our consent to the electrification of the 6-mile freight route between Camden road junction and Stratford, together with some freight terminals in north east London and Essex, and the purchase of four locomotives, at a total cost of £12·149 million. Our decision was based on an appraisal that showed the board's proposal to be justified on its financial merits.

Freight Handling Costs

26. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to the relative costs of handling freight at *(a)* scheme ports *(b)* non-scheme ports and *(c)* ports in Holland and Belgium.

Mr. David Mitchell: My Department does not have such information, much of which is commercially confidential.

Helicopters

27. **Mr. Sheerman** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on priority areas for improving helicopter safety.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Present and future helicopter airworthiness certification standards have been reviewed in depth by the Helicopter Airworthiness Review Panel (HARP) formed by the Airworthiness Requirements Board. Its report was published in June this year and makes 15 recommendations with emphasis on improvements in crashworthiness, sea survivability and reliability of rotor and transmission systems. Preliminary action is being taken on those capable of being implemented in the short term and actions are being planned on the remainder.

The trial track structure to and from Aberdeen has reduced the number of airmisses reported between helicopter and military aircraft; the trial is being extended through the winter months to determine its effectiveness when icing conditions force helicopters to fly at much lower heights. Revisions have also been introduced to the procedures for military aircraft at the Rosehearty bombing range. With the increasing helicopter activity in the Humberside area, the Ministry of Defence and the national air traffic services are currently developing procedures to integrate the activities of civil helicopters and military aircraft.

Private Roads (Humps)

28. **Mr. Shersby** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend the appropriate regulations to exempt private roads from the requirement to illuminate road humps.

Mrs. Chalker: Private roads which are not highways, are exempt from the provisions of the road humps

regulations, though I would hope that the spirit of the regulations would be followed. Lighting is important to ensure that humps are clearly seen by motorists.

Buses (White Paper)

30. **Mr. Waller** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many organisations have submitted comments on the White Paper, "Buses," Cmnd. 9300.

36. **Mr. Snape** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on his White Paper, "Buses"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert Atkins asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has had in connection with the White Paper, "Buses".

57. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received following the publication of the White Paper, "Buses".

58. **Mr. Martin** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received concerning the White Paper, "Buses".

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has had on the White Paper, "Buses".

Mr. David Mitchell: I refer my hon. Friends and the hon. Gentlemen to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) earlier today.

38. **Mr. Chope** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will arrange for the supply and distribution of his Department's leaflet, "Buses: a guide to the White Paper", to residents in Southampton.

Mr. David Mitchell: No, but a copy is available to any individual who asks for one.

49. **Mr. Stern** asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received from individual taxi drivers and their representative bodies on the proposals in his recent White Paper, "Buses".

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received over 300 representations from individual taxi drivers and their associations. All but 95 of these consisted of a common printed text.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library all the replies to the White Paper, "Buses".

Mr. David Mitchell: No.

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on his White Paper, "Buses", Cmnd. 9300.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have received around 2,000 representations on the White Paper and on the consultation documents which my Department issued following the publication of the White Paper.

As announced in the Gracious Speech we will be bringing forward a Bill later in this Session to implement the proposals. The representations we have received are being studied by my Department as part of the preparation of that Bill.

GLC Lorry Ban

31. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the effect on businesses of the implementation of the Greater London (Restriction of Goods Vehicles) Traffic Order.

Mr. Ridley: I have so far seen no adequate justification by the GLC of its proposals or detailed assessment of the effects. What is clear is that hundreds of firms and trade associations have written voicing concern over the potential impact of the proposals on jobs and prices in London.

34. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what action he proposes to take following the Greater London council's proposals for a night-time and weekends ban on heavy lorries.

48. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the proposals by the Greater London council to ban lorries within the Greater London council area at night and week-ends; and what action he proposes to take on this matter.

Mr. Ridley: I have made clear my view that for a major London-wide proposal of this magnitude a properly constituted public inquiry would provide a well established democratic method of assessment.

I understand the GLC transport committee will be meeting on 21 November to consider the massive response to consultation and the many hundreds of calls for a public inquiry.

Liverpool Freeport

32. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company on the progress of the Liverpool freeport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: The company showed me the site and discussed it briefly with me when I visited the port earlier this year. My right hon. Friend will also be visiting the port shortly. I understand that the freeport has been operational since the beginning of October and will be opened officially by Her Royal Highness Princess Anne on 29 November.

Air Fares

33. **Mr. Robert B. Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made in negotiating more competitive fares for air travelling in Europe.

Mr. Ridley: We want our airlines to be free to introduce more competitive fares wherever they see a market need which is not being adequately met. They now have that freedom between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands and some fares have come down to as little as £49 return as a result. Substantial reductions have also been obtained in fares to the Federal Republic of Germany. Except in the Netherlands, fares require the approval of both Governments. We are seeking to persuade our other partners in Europe that the approval of the country where the journey starts should be a sufficient safeguard against both monopoly exploitation and uneconomic dumping.

Motorways (Roadworks)

35. **Mr. Moynihan** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has considered an effective system of cost benefit analysis for major roadworks on motorways.

Mrs. Chalker: We use sophisticated surveying techniques to determine when major motorway maintenance works are needed and the most cost-effective treatment required. In planning the works we always take account of the cost of traffic disruption.

Settle–Carlisle Line

37. **Mr. Watson** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what will be the date for the start of the public inquiry into the proposed closure of the Settle to Carlisle line.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Transport Act 1962 provides that the area transport users consultative committees with whom objections to a closure proposal have been lodged may decide to hear objections and representations orally.

I understand that in the case of the British Railways Board's proposal to withdraw passenger services over the Settle–Carlisle line, the TUCCs concerned are unlikely to be ready to hold public hearings before the spring, though this is of course a matter for them.

M25 (Reigate–Wisley)

39. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide latest estimates for the dates when the three remaining M25 contracts in the south western quarter between Reigate and Wisley will be complete and the road open to traffic.

Mrs. Chalker: The contract completion dates for the Wisley–Leatherhead and Leatherhead–Reigate sections are 5 August and 26 August 1985, respectively. The Leatherhead interchange section was completed nine months early but it cannot be used without one of the adjoining sections. I expect the whole of the length between Reigate and Wisley to be opened to traffic next summer.

Rail Lines (Bus Substitution)

40. **Mr. Anderson** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he expects to introduce a Bill on the substitution of rail by bus services in the present Session of Parliament.

50. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to introduce bus substitution for rail services in England.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to encourage the substitution of buses for certain rail lines.

Mr. David Mitchell The House will be invited to approve enabling legislation this Session. Under it, when British Rail sought consent from the Secretary of State to the withdrawal of a railway service, it would be able to propose substitute bus services.

Municipal Bus Undertakings

42. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends municipal bus undertakings to become public limited companies or whether he proposes to seek privatisation.

Mr. Ridley: The intention is that initially district councils bus undertakings should be incorporated as limited liability companies, wholly owned by the parent authorities. It will be open to district councils to privatise the companies subsequently if they wish, though we are not seeking to require them to do so.

Channel and River Crossings

43. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if Her Majesty's Government will give priority to a second Severn crossing a third Dartford tunnel and the faster completion of the present trunk road programme over a Channel crossing.

Mrs. Chalker: The trunk road programme will be completed as quickly as the statutory procedures and necessary finance allow.

The need for a second Severn crossing has not been established but a study into how a second crossing might be provided—should it be needed—is under way and will be completed in 1986.

The Dartford tunnel is the responsibility of Essex and Kent county councils but traffic flows are being monitored and the need for extra capacity will be reviewed as necessary.

The Government have made clear that any scheme for a Channel fixed link would have to be financed entirely by the private sector and without any form of Government commercial guarantee.

London Regional Transport

44. **Mr. Tony Banks** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of London Regional Transport.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend last met the chairman of London Regional Transport on 24 July 1984. I met him on 31 October 1984 and see him from time to time as necessary.

Rear Seat Belts

45. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will introduce legislation to make the wearing of rear seat belts compulsory.

Mrs. Chalker: I have no plans to introduce such legislation.

Cross-Channel Link

47. **Sir Anthony Meyer** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what developments there have been in the past three months over the provision of a fixed cross-Channel link.

Mr. David Mitchell: I understand that various groups are still considering the preparation of detailed financing proposals for a Channel fixed link, following the reply given by my right Hon. Friend on 22 May to my hon. Friends the Members for Maidstone (Sir J. Wells), and

Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) at column *380-381*. My right hon. Friend will be meeting the French Minister of Transport this week to consider what the next steps for the two Governments should be, if proposals meeting the conditions set out in our earlier statement are forthcoming.

Scottish Lowland Airports

Mr. McKelvey asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he will complete the review of Scotland's lowland airports.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Around the end of the year.

60. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the "Review of Scottish Lowland Airport Policy".

Mr. Michael Spicer: Over 270 specific responses to the consultation document, and about 500 more general letters.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects to complete the review of Scottish lowland airports.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Around the end of the year.

Rail Services (Expenditure)

52. **Mr. Bagier** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total expenditure on rail services, under section 20 of the Transport Act 1968, in the most recent year for which information is available.

55. **Mr. Ron Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total expenditure on rail services, under section 20 of the Transport Act 1968, in the most recent year for which information is available.

Mr. David Mitchell: The British Railways Board's annual report for 1983 shows payments of £77·8 million due in that year from passenger transport executives under section 20 of the Transport Act 1968.

Road and Rail Passenger Transport

54. **Mr. Home Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Government's views on competition between road and rail passenger transport.

Mr. Ridley: Competition ensures that the consumer can choose the best services and the best prices. The Government are determined to widen the scope for competition wherever possible and this certainly includes competition between the various modes of transport.

Rail and Waterway Facilities

56. **Mr. Coombs** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what grant he has given in the current year for rail and waterway facilities; and what effects these have had on road traffic.

Mr. David Mitchell: So far this year I have approved 12 rail grants and one waterway grant. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland have each approved two rail grants. When built and running at full potential it is anticipated that these projects will avoid more than 200,000 lorry movements a year on environmentally unsuitable roads.

Bus and Coach Operators

61. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will raise the operator's licence fee paid by bus and coach operators for each vehicle.

Mr. David Mitchell: The public service vehicles operator's licence fee is set at a figure which covers expenditure on administration and enforcement of operator licensing. Fees are now calculated at £42 per vehicle per year and this is kept under review.

M40 (Birmingham-Oxford)

62. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Transport when a decision on the M40 Birmingham-Oxford extension is now expected.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and the Environment are currently considering the report of the independent inspector who conducted public inquiries into the proposals between September 1982 and June 1983. We hope to announce our decisions around the end of the year.

Pedestrian Crossings (Prohibited Parking)

63. **Mr. Higgins** asked the Secretary of State for Transport why zig-zag lines indicating that parking is prohibited ahead of pedestrian crossings are not also used ahead of traffic lights.

Mr. Ridley: The zig-zag lines at zebra crossings prohibit overtaking as well as parking. It would not be right to prohibit overtaking on the approaches to a junction controlled by traffic lights. Parking prohibitions on the approaches to traffic lights can be indicated by the use of yellow lines.

M25 (Reigate-Leatherhead)

64. **Mr. George Gardiner** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the decision by Bovis Birse to cease work on the Reigate-Leatherhad interchange section of the M25 for six months, after having been granted a six-month extension for completion of the contract.

Mrs, Chalker: This contract follows the ICE Conditions of Contract (5th Edition). The Department's consultants who have an independent role as engineer to the contract have awarded extensions of time until 26 August 1985. It is for the contractor to decide his own programme to meet this date; if it is not met, liquidated damages will be payable. I expect the whole length of the M25 between Wisley and Reigate to be completed next summer.

Civil Engineering Work (VAT)

65. **Mr. Speed** asked the Secretary of State for Transport what reduction in his Department's programme will be caused by the decision to extend value added tax liability to roads and other civil engineering work.

Mrs. Chalker: Latest estimates indicate that the reduction in resources available for the motorway and trunk road programme following the extension of value-added tax to alterations to civil engineering works will be not more than £3 million in total over this and the next

financial year. This will not significantly affect the pace and momentum of the trunk road programme. From April 1985 all tax on highways works will be recoverable.

Road Freight Transport

Mr. Mudd asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the latest forecasts for road freight transport in *(a)* million tonnes and *(b)* thousand million tonne kilometres for the years 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010.

Mrs. Chalker: Uncertainty inevitably surrounds forecasts of road freight made many years into the future. For this reason the Department adopts a range of forecasts. The forecasts of goods carried by road which underlie the curent National Road Traffic Forecasts, published in July 1980, are as follows:

Road Freight

	million tonnes		*billion tonnes-kms*	
	low	*high*	*low*	*high*
1985	1,505	1,515	109·4	116·8
1990	1,510	1,530	115·7	126·1
1995	1,515	1,545	119·1	132·6
2000	1,520	1,560	122·5	137·6

Forecasts of road freight traffic (vehicle-kms) beyond 2000 are produced by extrapolation: no forecasts of goods carried by road are available after that date.

These forecasts are currently under review.

Roads (Expenditure)

Mr. Mudd asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will show regional expenditure on roads in the same format as table 1.13 in "Transport Statistics Great Britain 1972-82" for the years 1980-81, 1982-83 and 1983-84.

Mrs. Chalker: An equivalent table for 1982-83 will be included in Transport Statistics Great Britain, 1973-83, which is due to be published next month. Information for 1983-84 is not yet available, but a table is to be compiled for next years issue of Transport Statistics Great Britain. Figures for 1980-81 could only be produced at disproportionate cost.

Airports

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the bids for expenditure on airport improvements currently in his hands in respect of proposed capital expenditure in 1985-86.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Such bids are regarded as having been made in confidence and it is not the practice for the Government to publish them.

291 Plumstead High Street, London, SE18.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what references his Department obtained on the suitability of the applicants before letting 291 Plumstead High Street, London, SE18, for use as a hostel for homeless young men;

(2) when the letting of his Department's property at 291 Plumstead High Street, London, SE18, as a hostel for homeless youths commenced; what is the total sum now due in rent; and how much has so far been received.

Mrs. Chalker: References were obtained from the South East London Probation and After-Care Service, the applicants' bank and a local business.

The letting of this property as a hostel for homeless youths commenced on 18 April 1983. Following an initial three months rent-free period, during which an agreed schedule of repairs was carried out, a total of £4,959·77 arrears of rent has accrued and no moneys have been received.

A47 (Billesdon Bypass)

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he still anticipates that work on the A47 Billesdon bypass will commence in the current year.

Mrs. Chalker: Construction of the Billesdon bypass is now expected to start in the early summer of 1985.

Following a public inquiry into the scheme proposals, earlier this year, the inspector recommended minor modifications and consultations with those affected have now been successfully completed.

Motorways

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many kilometres of motorway were *(a)* in use, *(b)* under construction and *(c)* planned but not under construction at 1 November 1983 and 1984.

Mrs. Chalker: The information requested is as follows:

Kilometres of motorway as at	*1 November 1983*	*1 November 1984*
In use	2,294	2,368
Under construction	124	137
Planned	242	186

Road Accidents (Statistics)

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state, for 1982 and 1983, the costs to the community of road accidents, categorised by *(a)* lost output, *(b)* police and administration, *(c)* medical and ambulance services, *(d)* damage to property and *(e)* pain, grief and suffering.

Mrs. Chalker: The estimated costs of road accidents for 1982 and 1983 are:

£ million

	1982	*1983*
(a) Lost output	715	693
(b) Police and administration	124	124
(c) Medical and ambulance services*	73	119
(d) Damage to property	903	906
(e) Pain, grief and suffering	560	535
Total cost	2,375	2,378

* Medical and ambulance costs in the two years have been calculated on a different basis and the two figures are not comparable (the main difference being that the 1983 figure, unlike that for 1982, includes a capital cost element).

M1-M6 (Lighting)

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will list those sections of the M1 motorway up

to junction 19 and those sections of the M6 motorway to junction 7 which are presently without lighting, giving the total number of miles of unlit motorway between these points and the total number of miles of motorway between these points which are lit.

Mrs. Chalker: The unlit sections of the M1 motorway up to junction 19 are from Newport Pagnell service area (north of junction 14) to Heyford (junction 16), and Watford Gap (junction 17) to Catthorpe (junction 19). The unlit sections of the M6 motorway up to junction 7 are from Catthorpe (junction 19 on M1) to the eastern side of junction 2 and from the western side of junction 2 to Coleshill (junction 4). The total unlit length of motorway on the M1 up to junction 19 is 22 miles, and the corresponding lit length is 55 miles. The total unlit length of motorway on the M6 up to junction 7 is 21 miles, and the corresponding lit length is 15 miles.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Transport, what regulations he enforces for the transportation of radioactive waste through England by road and rail; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The safety standards for the transport of radioactive materials are based on the International Atomic Energy Agency's Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Materials 1973 Revised Edition (as amended). These are given effect in the UK by the following:

(i) Road

The Radio-active Substances (Carriage by Road) (Great Britain) Regulations 1974 (SI 1974/1735)

The Radio-active Substances (Road Transport Workers) (Great Britain) Regulations 1970 (SI 1970/1827) and (Amendment) Regulations 1975 (SI 1975/1522)

(ii) Rail

British Railways Board List of Dangerous Goods (LDG) and Conditions of Acceptance by Freight and Passenger Train (1977 Edition as amended)

Bypassed Communities (Service Signs)

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the outcome of the consultation he has recently undertaken with regard to local service signs for bypassed communities.

Mrs. Chalker: Although replies were requested by the end of October, comments are still being received, so it is too early to reach conclusions on the proposals.

Air Treaties (Far East)

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, in the interest of protecting British Airways against competition on its routes to Australia, it is his intention to seek revision of air treaties with Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have no plans at present to seek any changes in our arrangements with Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. We have, however, been unable satisfactorily to resolve a recent dispute with the Philippines and have therefore given 12 months' notice to terminate the air services agreement. During this period I shall be prepared to consider any proposals which will lead to the maintenance of services between Manila and Hong Kong and between Manila and London on a basis which is acceptable to both parties.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Heffer asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact on transport fares on Merseyside of Her Majesty's Government's plans to abolish the Merseyside county council.

Mr. David Mitchell: Abolition of the metropolitan counties will not, of itself, affect the level of fares in the metropolitan areas.

Microlight Aircraft

Mr. Gerald Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has had discussions with the Civil Aviation Authority concerning the mandatory fitting of stroboscopic anti-collision beacons to microlight aircraft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Discussions have not been held with the Civil Aviation Authority on this issue. Neither we nor the CAA have been approached about the fitting of such lights.

Dim-Dip Regulations

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all the representations received to date in favour of the proposed dim-dip regulations and also all those against.

Mrs. Chalker: The dim-dip regulations were made on 14 December 1983 and came into operation on 13 January 1984.

Since we first consulted on the dim-dip regulations in November 1982 we have received representations from the following:

In support of Dim-Dip

The Royal Automobile Club
The Royal Scottish Automobile Club
The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
The Traffic Committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers
The Institute of Public Lighting Engineers
The Association of Optical Practitioners
The Chartered Institute of Buildings Services (incorporating the Illuminating Engineering Society)
Institute of Highway Engineers
Institution of Municipal Engineers
Institute of Road Transport Engineers
National Association of Approved Driving Instructors
British Motorcyclists Federation
Pedal Cyclists Association
Pedestrians Association
The Company of Veteran Motorists
The Freight Transport Association
The Association of County Councils
The Association of District Councils
National Association of Local Councils
Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Trading Standards
Chartered Institute of Transport
Scottish Motor Traders Association
Institute of Transport Administration
British Gas
Co-operative Union Limited
Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry
The Hull Road Courtesy and Safety Group
Association of Motorcyclists Against Discriminatory Legislation
Taylor and Whittaker—Consultant Engineers
The Sand and Gravel Association

Darstan Limited—Component Manufacturers
Stella Limited—Component Manufacturers
Opposed to Dim-Dip
The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and a number of individual vehicle manufacturers
The Night Safety Advisory Bureau
The Automobile Association
The Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety
The Road Haulage Association
GLC Officers
The Bus and Coach Council
The Motor Agents Association
The Association of Trailer Manufacturers
The Motor Caravaners Association

Motorways (Signposts)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will consider the viability of supplementary sign posts on Britain's motorways.

Mrs. Chalker: I am always willing to consider ways of improving our traffic signs but it is vital, in the interests of road safety, that signing on our motorways is kept to the minimum necessary for the safe guidance and efficient management of traffic.

Testing Stations

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will detail the likely effect on the existing Ministry of Transport testing stations, should the proposed Ministry of Transport regulations be introduced.

Mrs. Chalker: I intend to set new conditions for garages entering the MOT testing scheme to improve its operation. I propose that existing testing stations should also meet these conditions, but to give them a liberal period in which to comply.

The main changes that existing stations would be expected to make involve the size and layout of testing bays, which would be used only for MOT or commercial inspection work; minor changes to equipment; the provision of a waiting room overlooking the testing area; and improved arrangements for the safe keeping of test certificates.

Representatives of the motor trade and motoring organisations have been consulted about these proposals but not all have yet submitted their replies. When they have been received, I shall take them into account before reaching a final decision.

WALES

Local Government

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish his reply to the seven-point resolution forwarded to him by the Welsh counties committee and supported by the district councils of Wales calling for an independent commission to report on the constitutional relationship between central and local government, passed by the Welsh local authority associations at the Cardiff meeting on 4 June.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Welsh counties committee was informed that we saw no need to establish such a commission. The constitutional position of local authorities is clear. Their boundaries, powers and functions have been established by Act of Parliament and are subject to change by the will of Parliament.

Anglesey

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state as accurately as possible figues of those in work in Anglesey for each of the last six years; how many are full-time; how many are part-time; how many are female; and how many are self-employed.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Information on employees in employment disaggregated to the level requested is not collected annually. The Census of Employment is now carried out triennially and the latest information available is that from the Census of Employment conducted in 1981. The figures for 1981 and 1978 are:

Employees in Employment in Anglesey

	All Employees	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Females*
June 1978	16,858	14,006	2,852	6,141
June 1981	16,437	13,070	3,367	6,256

The Census of Population in 1981 gave a figure of 3,693 for the number of self-employed at that time: information in respect of subsequent years is not available.

EC Surplus Foodstuffs

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if, in relation to the storage of surplus EEC foodstuffs in Wales, he will indicate *(a)* the nature of the commodities involved, *(b)* the total volume or quantity in each case, *(c)* the total value according to the latest prices in each case, *(d)* total floor space occupied in each case, *(e)* the cost of providing rental and/or rates payable in each case, and *(f)* the original purchase costs in each case providing the information according to location in Wales; what was the position with regard to each of the above categories of information (i) one year ago and (ii) two years ago; and if he will estimate how each category is expected to change in the next year.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The information requested in *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* is as follow at 30 September 1984:

(a) Commodity	*(b) Quantity (Tonnes)*	*(c) Value £ million*
Skimmed Milk Powder	22,263	22·85
Butter	14,772	28·50
Beef	475	1·32

The information requested at *(d)* is not available, that at *(e)* is commercially confidential and the information sought at *(f)*, (i) and (ii) could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. It is not possible to give a reasonable estimate of the storage position in Wales over the next year. Stocks will fluctuate as a result of offer levels determined by market forces, sales controlled by Commission decisions, and availability and cost of storage space.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the change in real terms in the total amount of funds he has given or sanctioned to be expended by local education authorities in Wales between 1979-80 and 1984-85.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: In cost terms the change between local authorities' actual expenditure in 1979-80 and

planned provision for 1984-85 is a decrease of 2 per cent. This figure is calculated using the deflator for gross domestic product at market prices.

School Closures

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many school closures he has approved since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information requested is as follows:

	Numbers
1979	14
1980	15
1981	19
1982	10
1983	28
1984	21
Total	107

Of these some closures were technical closures such as the establishment of a primary school by the amalgamation of an infant and junior school which necessitated the closure of the infant and/or the junior school.

Teachers

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many teachers were employed in *(a)* the primary and *(b)* the secondary sector in Wales in 1979-80; how many such posts exist in 1984-85; and what is his estimate of the primary and secondary teaching force in Wales in 1985-86.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The number of teachers employed in 1979-80 is shown in table 10.01 of "Statistics of Education in Wales", No. 8, 1983, a copy of which is in the Library. Information in respect of 1984-85 is not yet available. The Government's expenditure plans, as outlined in Cmnd. 9143, assume that the number of full-time equivalent nursery, primary and secondary teachers will be 26,100 in 1985-86.

Council Houses

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the change in real terms of moneys spent or proposed to be spent on council house buildings, excluding receipts on sales, over the years 1979-80 to 1984-85.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The latest local authority assessment of the 1984-85 capital expenditure on the housing revenue account is £46 million below the 1979-80 level.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses were constructed in 1979-80; how many were constructed in 1983-84; and what is the projected number of council house starts for 1984-85.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Figures for public sector dwellings completed are:

	Local authority	*New town*
1979-80	3,098	340
1983-84*	1,556	138

* Provisional.

No reliable estimate of housing starts for 1984-85 is available.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the annual amounts realised from council house sales for each year since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The following table gives the net discounted selling price for council dwellings sold in the years 1979-80 to 1984-85.

	£ million
1979-80	8·8
1980-81	12·1
1981-82	85·2
1982-83	111·0
1983-84*	62·1
1984-85†	45·8

* Provisional outturn.
† Local authority forecast.

Local Authority Finance

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the change in real terms of the total moneys allocated to local authorities in Wales over the period 1979-80 to 1983-84; and if he will provide separate figures for district and county authorities.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: We assume that the hon. Gentleman is concerned with central Government grants and subsidies to local authorities. These fell by £92 million between 1979-80 and 1983-84 (at 1983-84 prices). A separate comparison for county and district authorities is not possible because of the introduction of block grant in 1981-82.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage change, in cash and real terms is represented by the figures for rate support grant in Wales for 1984-85, projected in July 1984, as compared with the actual figures for 1979-80; and if he will provide separate figures for district and county authorities.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: A separate comparison for district and county authorities is not possible because of the introduction of block grant in 1981-82. The information available is as follows. The 1979-80 figures include second increase order and the 1984-85 figures are as at the first supplementary report.

Rate support grant

	Percentage change 1979-80 to 1984-85	
	Cash terms	*Real terms**
Domestic element†	−45·2	−64·0
Other elements‡	+44·6	−5·0
Total	+37·5	−9·6

* Deflated to 1984-85 prices using the Gross Domestic Product Deflator.

† Domestic relief is paid to district authorities as a flat rate subsidy (36p in the $ 1979-80, 18½p in the £ 1984-85), to reduce the level of rates paid by the domestic ratepayer.

‡ Prior to 1981-82 the remainder of rate support grant consisted of a needs element and a resources element. From 1979-80, the needs element was distributed separately to districts and counties. Resources element was paid to districts only, but part was appropriated by the county via its precept. For 1984-85 the remainder of rate support grant consists of a separate Block Grant for each authority.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total level of expenditure on the assisted places scheme in Wales from central Government funds in 1982-83 and 1983-84; and what is the estimated level of expenditure for 1984-85.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The expenditure in the financial years 1982-83 and 1983-84 was £275,000 and £455,000 respectively. The estimated cost for 1984-85 is £634,000.

Council Houses (Asbestos)

Mr. John asked the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest figures for the rate of implementation of the programmes to remove asbestos from council houses in Wales; and if he will make special financial provision from central Government funds to accelerate the programme.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: In many cases asbestos is best left alone if it is in a good and solid condition. It is up to each district council to decide on the appropriate action for dealing with asbestos in its housing stock and there is no central programme.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much funding the Welsh Development Agency has received *(a)* in total and *(b)* annually since 1979; and what is the change in real terms of the amount of cash given to the Welsh Development Agency between 1979-80 and the stated budgets for 1984-85.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The Welsh Development Agency has received a total of £287·3 million in Government funds over the period 1979-80 to 1983-84 inclusive, made up as follows:

	£million
1979-80	47·6
1980-81	64·6
1981-82	76·0
1982-83	56·7
1983-84	42·4

Adjusting for general inflation as measured by the 1982-83 GDP deflator, the agency's Supply Estimates provision for 1984-85 amounts to £42·5 million compared with a similarly adjusted figure for 1979-80 of £66·2 million. The reduction in resources over the last few years essentially reflects the completion of the agency's major capital programmes in the steel closure areas.

SCOTLAND

National Health Service

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were employed in the National Health Service in Scotland at the latest date; what were the figures in June 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: At 30 September 1983, there were in whole-time equivalent terms 124,491 staff employed in the National Health Service in Scotland. The equivalent figure as at 30 September 1979 (June figures are not available) was 115,984. These statistics show that the number of staff in the Scottish Health Service has increased by 7·3 per cent. since this Government came to office.

Doctors

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many doctors were employed in the National Health Service in Scotland at the latest date; what were the figures in June 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: At 30 September 1983, there were in whole-time equivalent terms 9,038 doctors, including general medical practitioners, engaged in the National Health Service in Scotland. The equivalent figure as at 30 September 1979 (June figures are not available) was 8,616. These statistics show that the number of doctors in the Scottish Health Service has increased by around 5 per cent. since this Government came to office.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many doctors were unemployed in Scotland at the latest available date; and what were the comparable figures for June 1979.

Mr. John MacKay: At 30 September 1982, the number of registered unemployed in Scotland claiming medical qualifications (who would not necessarily all be seeking employment as doctors) was 106. The comparable figure for June 1979 was 35. Since analysis of the registered unemployed by occupation has been discontinued, information beyond 1982 from this source is not available to my Department. Information from other sources suggests that any unemployment experienced by doctors is of short duration and occurs mainly when moving from one stage of specialised training to another, but my Department is keeping a close watch on the position.

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how much funding the Scottish Development Agency has received *(a)* in total and *(b)* annually since 1979; and what has been the change in real terms in the amount of money they are expected to receive in 1984-85 and the amount they received in 1979-80.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Since 1979 the Scottish Development Agency has received Government funding as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	64·9
1980-81	79·9
1981-82	76·4
1982-83	101·5
1983-84	89·7
*1984-84	99·4
Total	511·8

* Supply estimate.

Adjusting for general inflation as measured by the GDP deflator at 1982-83 market prices, the agency's supply estimate provision for 1984-85 amounts to £90·7 million as compared with the similarly adjusted 1979-80 figure of £90·2 million.

Mr. George Beattie

Dame Judith Hart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will reply to the letter of 2 May about the conviction of George Beattie, from the right hon. Member for Clydesdale.

Mr. Younger: I have discussed the matters raised in that letter with the right hon. Member and I shall write as soon as I have completed my inquiries into the various points which she has raised about this case.

Private Residential Homes

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what steps he is taking to cater for the needs of old people living in private residential homes which are forced to close; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what plans he has to seek powers to control the number of private residential homes and the charges they impose for their services; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how many private residential homes have been closed down by local social services departments in Scotland during each of the past four years and in the first half of 1984; what reasons were given for these closures; and if he will make a statement;

(4) how many complaints he has investigated concerning old people being ill-treated or defrauded in private residential homes in Scotland since June 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: Residents admitted privately would have to make their own arrangements in the event of closure but assistance might be sought from the regional or islands councils' social work department. I would expect the social work department to take a close interest in alternative arrangements for sponsored residents.

Responsibility for registering private residential homes lies with the social work department; charges are a matter for the proprietor and the resident or his representative. My right hon. Friend has no plans to change those arrangements.

Social work departments are not required to inform my Department if registrations are cancelled and information about closures is not held centrally.

Allegations of ill-treatment or fraud would be for consideration by the social work department responsible for registering the home or for the police; no such complaints have been made to my right hon. Friend.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the expenditure on education per pupil in each education authority in Scotland in the latest year; and what was the average figure for Scotland overall.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The latest available information is shown in the following table:

Expenditure per full-time equivalent pupil 1982-83*

Regional/Islands council	£
Borders	1,007
Central	1,018
Dumfries and Galloway	994
Fife	1,020
Grampian	1,074
Highland	1,013
Lothian	1,080
Strathclyde	1,087
Tayside	1,041
Orkney	1,140
Shetland	1,459
Western Isles	1,196
Scotland	1,069

* Nursery, primary, secondary and special school pupils.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the expenditure on primary education per pupil in each education authority in Scotland in the latest available year; what is the Scottish average; and what were the corresponding figures for the two previous years.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is shown in the following table:

Net expenditure per pupil in primary schools (at out-turn prices)

Regional/Islands council	*1980-81* £	*1981-82* £	*1982-83* £
Borders	710	816	886
Central	586	688	778
Dumfries and Galloway	609	690	781
Fife	654	759	793
Grampian	631	740	823
Highland	618	700	795
Lothian	686	774	780
Strathclyde	635	757	844
Tayside	586	702	772
Orkney	926	980	982
Shetland	783	951	1,126
Western Isles	755	851	932
Scotland	638	750	821

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the amount spent on private education from Government sources in Scotland in the past three years; and if he will itemise the sources.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I list as follows assistance provided by my Department for school pupils educated in the private sector.

	Fiscal years		
	1981-82 £000	*1982-83* £000	*1983-84* £000
Grants to grant-aided secondary* schools (including St. Mary's music school)	2,759	2,491	2,002
Grants to grant-aided special schools	3,147	3,370	3,390
Assisted places grants	512	1,393	2,225
Aided places grants (St. Mary's music school)	—	—	58

* Maintenance Grant to St. Mary's music school ceased in 1983.

Cash Limits

Mr. Corrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes will be made to cash limits in 1984-85 which are within his responsibility.

Mr. Younger: The information is as follows:

Class XV, vote 3: regional and general industrial support, Scotland

Subject to parliamentary approval of the supplementary estimate the cash limit will be reduced by £2,338,000 to offset an increase on class XV, vote 5: selective assistance and compensation, Scotland.

Class XV, vote 6: roads, transport and environmental services, Scotland

Subject to parliamentary approval of the supplementary estimate the cash limit will be reduced by £65,000 to reflect the actual take up of increased provision allowed under the end-year flexibility scheme announced on 31 July 1984 at column *190*.

The new cash limits are summarised as follows:

	Present Cash Limit £	*New Cash Limit* £
Class XV		
Vote 3	139,489,000	137,151,000
Vote 6	149,896,000	149,831,000

These changes will not add to total planned public expenditure.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Tristan da Cunha

90. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has investigated the case for the generation of electricity by wind power on Tristan da Cunha; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Responsibility for the provision of electricity on Tristan da Cunha lies with the Island Council.

Mr. Varktes and Mrs. Lilian Arakelians

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is now able to convey his decision in respect of the application for a United Kingdom visa by a Mr. Varktes and Mrs. Lilian Arakelians, c/o 337 Ferdowsi Avenue, Tehran, following their interview at the British Interest Section of the Swedish embassy in Tehran on Tuesday 30 October.

Mr. Renton: No, Mr. and Mrs. Arakelian visited the British Interests Section on 30 October 1984 and were given an appointment for a visa interview for 12 November. After the entry clearance officer has interviewed the applicants he will make a decision on the applications or refer them for further advice as appropriate.

Council of Europe (Refugees and Overpopulation)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Government will now take up full membership of the Council of Europe fund for national refugees and overpopulation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The United Kingdom is not a member of the fund. We have no plans to join it.

Disarmament Convention (Perugia)

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the third European nuclear disarmament convention held in Perugia in July 1984.

Mr. Luce: This convention was, like its predecessors, critical of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Delegations from the official "peace committees" of several Warsaw pact countries were present for the first time, but a large number of representatives from unofficial peace and human rights groups in Eastern Europe were denied exit visas and were unable therefore to attend. Copies of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's background brief, the "Third European Nuclear Disarmament Convention, Perugia, July 1984", produced in September 1984, are available in the Library.

Foreign Compensation (Czechoslovakia)

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many claims have been lodged under the terms of the Foreign Compensation (Czechoslovakia) Order 1982; and how many have so far been dealt with by the Foreign Compensation Commission, indicating what proportions have been accepted and rejected.

Mr. Renton: A total of 2,184 claims have been lodged with the Foreign Compensation Commission. The commission has so far dealt with 236 of these claims. Eighty-one claims for awards of compensation have been accepted and provisionally assessed. Seventy-five claims have been dismissed either summarily or provisionally. In 80 cases the claimants have withdrawn their claims.

Helsinki Final Act

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about Her Majesty's Government's policy concerning any steps taken in the past six months by the Soviet Union towards the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act.

Mr. Rifkind: It is our policy to report to the House at six-monthly intervals on the implementation by the Soviet Union and other countries in eastern Europe of the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act. I last did so in the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) on 17 July at column 91. A further report will be submitted to the House early next year. Meanwhile, I regret to say that there have been no signs of improvement in the compliance by the Soviet Union with the provisions of the Final Act, especially in the human rights area.

Gibraltar

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the new agreement between Spain and the United Kingdom will give to any category of Spanish national right of access and ownership of property in Gibraltar which will not be available to Spanish nationals in other parts of the European Economic Community when Spain accedes to the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Renton: No new agreement has been concluded between Spain and the United Kingdom. On Spain's accession to the EC, Spanish nationals will be entitled to enjoy throughout the Community—including Gibraltar—those rights provided for by the treaty of Rome, subject to any derogations and transitional periods that may be agreed between the Community and Spain.

Nicaragua

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the nature and numbers of British diplomatic representation in Nicaragua.

Mr. Renton: The following diplomatic staff are accredited to Nicaragua:—An ambassador and consul-general who resides at San José, a chargé d'affaires, who resides in Managua. In addition, a first secretary and third secretary resident in San José are accredited to Nicaragua and a defence attaché and assistant defence attaché who reside in Mexico.

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received and what conclusions he has reached concerning the nature and conduct of the recent elections in Nicaragua; and if representatives of Her Majesty's Government were offered any facilities for observation.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. and learned Friend indicated to the House on 9 November the conclusion we reached concerning the recent elections in Nicaragua. We declined an invitation by the Supreme Electoral Commission of Nicaragua to send official observers. Her Majesty's ambassador during the normal exercise of his duties followed the election process and was afforded normal facilities.

United Nations Law of the Sea

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the United Nations law of the sea outlining those sections with which Her Majesty's Government *(a)* agree and *(b)* disagree, and the reasons for their assessment;

(2) if it is Her Majesty's Government's intention to sign and ratify the United Nations law of the sea convention.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend on 9 November to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Mr. Skeet) at column *41*.

Immigration

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, during his forthcoming visit to the Indian sub-continent, he will be discussing the introduction of tape recording facilities for interviews carried out by entry clearance officers and immigration officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. and learned Friend has no present plans to visit the Indian sub-continent.

I hope to visit Pakistan and Bangladesh early in the new year and will then give further consideration to the possibility of the tape recording of entry clearance interviews.

World Festivals of Youth and Students

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why he sent the note issued in August by the cultural relations department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the British Youth Council, regarding the World Festivals of Youth and Students.

Mr. Renton: The letter that accompanied the note to which the hon. Member refers set out our reasons. The main consideration was that the British Youth Council's membership should know the background to the World Festivals of Youth and Students, which have a long history as international Communist propaganda events.

Diplomatic Immunity

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what restrictions are placed by the United Kingdom on *(a)* the movements and *(b)* the normal privileges of foreign diplomats entitled to diplomatic immunity in Britain; and if he will give the foreign state concerned in each case.

Mr. Rifkind: Diplomats of the Soviet Union — except the head of mission — Vietnam, Mongolia and China are required to obtain permission and to give at least two working days' notice before travelling more than 35 miles—25 miles for Soviet diplomats—from Hyde park corner.

Limits are imposed, on a non-discriminatory basis, on the number of cars and the quantity of spirits and cigarettes which a diplomat may acquire duty-free.

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide a breakdown of the figures given to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 20 June concerning offences alleged to have been committed by foreign diplomats in the United Kingdom over the last 10 years so as to show to which foreign state or group of state each belongs.

Mr. Rifkind: No. It would be inappropriate to list the nationality of the alleged offenders since their guilt has not been established in court. Nor do I consider that it would be appropriate to indicate the regional group to which the alleged offenders belong.

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress made so far in formulating proposals for the reform of the law covering diplomatic immunity.

Mr. Rifkind: My right hon. and learned Friend intends to make a statement to the House on this subject in due course.

Diplomatic Bags

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent diplomatic bags on entry to the United Kingdom are subjected to scrutiny with the consent of the foreign state concerned.

Mr. Rifkind: Scrutiny of incoming foreign diplomatic bags is confined to checking that they bear visible external marks of their character, in accordance with article 27.4 of the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations. We do not scan or X-ray incoming bags. The implications of changing this practice, which accords with that followed by virtually all other states, remain under review.

Mr. Stanbrook asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the diplomatic representatives of the United Kingdom overseas are permitted to give consent to scrutiny of their diplomatic bags if requested.

Mr. Rifkind: We would not permit such scrutiny to go beyond checking that the bags bear visible external marks of their character, in accordance with article 27.4 of the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations. We do not scan or X-ray incoming bags. The implications of changing this practice, which accords with that followed by virtually all other states, remain under review.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Mikardo asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the London Docklands Development Corporation will take steps to ensure that the *Daily Telegraph* uses water transport for the delivery of paper when it moves into its new site on the Isle of Dogs.

Sir George Young: The possibility of using water transport is being discussed by the *Daily Telegraph* and LDDC, but ultimately the method by which paper is delivered is a commercial matter for the *Daily Telegraph* to decide.

Mr. Mikardo asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been spent on infrastructure on each site that the London Docklands Development Corporation has acquired in the enterprise zone, site by site, on the Isle of Dogs.

Sir George Young: The cost of infrastructure works carried out by LDDC within the enterprise zone, primarily on new roads, drainage and main services, cannot be broken down among individual sites.

Mr. Mikardo asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what price the London Docklands Development Corporation paid per acre for each site that it has acquired in the enterprise zone in the Isle of Dogs.

Sir George Young: Final settlement of terms for the bulk of the land acquired by LDDC in the enterprise zone is still the subject of negotiation and, in one case, a reference to the Lands Tribunal. To provide further information would prejudice these and future negotiations.

Rate Support Grant (Computer Time)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the estimated cost to his Department of computer time devoted to rate support grant, including targets and penalties, and rate limitation in each year from 1981-82 to 1985-86, most recent estimate; and what proportion was undertaken outside the United Kingdom.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The estimated cost to this Department of computer time devoted to Rate Support Grant in each of the years 1981-82 and 1985-86 is as follows:

Annual Expenditure including VAT

	£
1981-82	606,400
1982-83	615,200
1983-84	606,600
1984-85*	495,000
1985-86†	576,000

* Estimated outturn.
† Projected.

All this expenditure is now incurred with computer bureaux based in the United Kingdom.

Local Authorities (Expenditure Targets)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the percentage of total national expenditure targets made up by the targets of *(a)* inner London boroughs, *(b)* outer London boroughs, *(c)* London precepting authorities, *(d)* metropolitan districts, *(e)* metropolitan counties, *(f)* non-metropolitan districts and *(g)* non-metropolitan counties in each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The information is as follows:

Targets (per cent.)

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
Inner London boroughs	3·55	4·60	4·54	4·58
Outer London boroughs	8·63	8·89	8·69	8·65
London precepting authorities*	6·43	6·19	6·71	6·74
Metropolitan districts	19·74	20·85	20·50	20·41
Metropolitan counties	6·60	5·42	5·58	5·55
Non-metropolitan districts	6·52	7·45	7·30	7·31
Non-metropolitan counties	48·53	46·60	46·68	46·76

* Excluding the Metropolitan police.

Block Grant

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total claims on block grant at original budget stage in each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85, showing for each year the percentage overclaim or underclaim.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The information is as follows:

	£ million	**Per cent.*
1981-82	8,653·5	+3·6
1982-83	8,756·0	+0·9
1983-84	8,665·0	−0·7
1984-85	8,560·2	−0·6

* over (+) or under (−) claim.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the block grant paid in each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85 to each of the 18 authorities designated under the Rates Act 1984.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The information is given in the table. The figures are the amount of block grant paid to the authorities in respect of the years shown. All figures are latest entitlements, after holdback. Those for 1981-82 are final entitlements; those for 1982-83 are based on outturn expenditure information; those for 1983-84 and 1984-85 are based on budgets.

The figures for London Boroughs for 1981-82 include grant paid in respect of the Greater London council and the Metropolitan police; and those for 1982-83 include the Metropolitan police.

£ million

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
Merseyside	70·1	69·6	67·8	62·5
South Yorkshire	65·9	70·3	68·3	62·3
Sheffield	89·9	86·1	82·8	84·3
ILEA	nil	nil	nil	nil

	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
GLC	*	126·1	nil	nil
Camden	12·9	7·8	nil	nil
Greenwich	29·2	27·4	22·7	21·4
Hackney	41·8	40·9	42·7	41·2
Islington	27·4	28·4	21·6	nil
Lambeth	51·2	54·5	44·1	32·4
Lewisham	44·0	44·5	42·5	38·7
Southwark	43·1	37·4	32·5	13·7
Brent	51·8	56·6	51·5	50·3
Haringey	57·0	59·2	51·6	50·2
Basildon	3·5	3·0	2·0	nil
Portsmouth	7·9	7·0	8·8	7·8
Leicester	9·7	8·1	8·3	9·7
Thamesdown	4·6	3·8	3·0	2·5

* Grant paid to London boroughs.

Urban Development Grants

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many projects to date are covered by urban development grants; how much public expenditure is involved in the current financial year; and how much is committed thereby in future years.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: My Department has so far given final approval to 102 projects for urban development grant. A further 30 projects have received offers of grant to which responses from local authorities remain outstanding. The estimated total costs of these 132 projects are more than £347 million. Of this some £280 million would be invested by the private sector and £67 million would be met by the urban development grant and other public funds, spread over several years.

These figures do not include offers of urban development grant which have not been taken up.

Archaeological Heritage (European Convention)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration the Government are giving to the draft European convention on the archaeological heritage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: The European convention on the protection of the archaeological heritage was ratified by the United Kingdom on 8 December 1972 and came into effect on 9 March 1973.

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration the Government are giving to the draft European convention on the underwater archaeological heritage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I have been asked to reply.

We are consulting interested groups in this country following the last meeting in March of the Council of Europe committee which is drafting this convention. The committee's mandate has been extended until 31 December 1985.

Inner City Areas (Special Aid Programme)

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give an up-to-date breakdown of the organisations and projects which have benefited from the Government's special aid programme for inner city areas, since 1981.

Sir George Young: Of the 21,000 projects worth some £830 million supported under the urban programme since 1981, 66 per cent. were run by local authorities, 30 per cent. by voluntary organisations, and 4 per cent. by private organisations. By project type, 35 per cent. of the total number of projects were economic, 17 per cent. environmental and 48 per cent. social.

Inner Urban Areas

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will extend to designated authorities under the Inner Urban Areas Act 1978 allocations for social schemes on the same basis as applies to partnership and programme authorities.

Sir George Young: No. It is the Government's policy to concentrate urban programme resources in the partnership and programme authority areas, as they have the greatest needs. Other designated districts do, however, have access to limited funding under the traditional urban programme to support social projects.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will extend to all authorities designated under the Inner Urban Areas Act 1978 disregard for all expenditure arising from the urban area scheme.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend will consider the representations he has received to that effect before final decisions are made on grant abatement for any year.

Urban Programme

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources he is proposing to make available to the designated districts under the urban programme in 1984-85.

Sir George Young: Designated districts which are not partnership or programme authorities have been allocated £8 million for industrial and commercial projects in 1984-85. They will also receive about £10 million under the traditional urban programme.

Council Properties (Sales)

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, of the 600,000 dwellings sold by local authorities and new towns in England from April 1979 to June 1984, how many were flats.

Sir George Young: About 23,000 of these dwellings were flats.

Rate Support Grants

Mr. Wood asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what change he proposes to make in the cash limit for rate support grants, England, class XVIII, vote 1.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 1 will be increased by £21,000,000 from £8,848,000,000 to £8,869,000,000. Provision on this vote is not classified as public expenditure. This increase is required in order to reflect fully:

(a) the abatement of block grant in respect of 1984-85 by £452,000,000 authorised by the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) 1984-85 (approved by by the House on 18 July 1984);

(b) the increase by £45,000,000 in block grant payable in respect of 1982-83 authorised by the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) (No. 2) 1982-83 (approved by by the House on 18 July 1984);
(c) the recovery of £44,000,000 block grant in respect of 1983-84 authorised by the Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) (No. 2) 1983-84 (approved by the House on 20 March 1984).

It also takes account of a further abatement of grant entitlement for 1984-85 of an estimated £3,000,000, in the light of an adjustment to the total budgeted expenditure figures received from local authorities. This is subject to the approval of another rate support grant supplementary report for 1984-85, which my right hon. Friend hopes to lay before the House in December.

The cash limit reduction which my right hon. Friend announced on 14 June 1984 anticipated an overall reduction in grant payable in 1984-85 of £475,000,000 from £9,323,000,000 to £8,848,000,000.

Housing Starts

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of public sector housing starts in each year from 1978 onwards and the estimated total starts for 1984; and what has been the reduction in percentage terms between the number of such starts in 1978 and in 1983.

Sir George Young: The figures for England from 1978, including provisional statistics for January to September 1984, appear in table 2 of the Department's monthly housing statistics press notice (No. 484) published on 1 November: a copy is in the library.

Public sector housing starts were 56 per cent. lower in 1983 than in 1978.

The Department has made no estimates for the whole of 1984.

Public Sector Housing

Mr. Winnick asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in the last two years from local authorities, housing associations, and voluntary organisations expressing concern over the housing shortage and urging the need for a greater supply of public sector housing; and if he will name the organisations and place a copy of their letters in the Library.

Sir George Young: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

United Nations Environment Programme

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what participation his Department will have, in the coming year, in the United Nations environment programme.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The United Kingdom hopes to be re-elected during the current General Assembly to the governing council of the United Nations environment programme (UNEP). My Department is responsible for co-ordinating the Government's participation in the work of UNEP and will lead the delegation to the Governing Council in May 1985. We will also continue to give our support to individual activities within the programme.

Mr. Gale asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's current involvement with the United Nations environment programme human settlements (habitat) project.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The Department was represented at the last meeting of the United Nations commission on human settlements (habitat) in May of this year by an official observer. It is anticipated that an observer will attend the next meeting of the commission next May.

Housing Defects Act 1984

Mr. Powley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when further information is to be published on the scheme of assistance for private owners of prefabricated reinforced concrete houses under the Housing Defects Act 1984.

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those orders which have been made under the Housing Defects Act 1984 and those orders which he intends to make in the next six months.

Mr. Gow: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment, for Scotland and for Wales have made the Housing Defects Act 1984 (Commencement) Order 1984 which brings the Act, with the exception of section 28, into effect in Great Britain on 1 December 1984.

My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales, by virtue of the Housing Defects (Prefabricated Reinforced Concrete Dwellings) (England and Wales) Designations 1984, made on 1 November 1984, have designated for the purposes of the scheme of assistance the following classes of building, as defined in the Designations:

Airey
Boot
Cornish Unit
Dorran
Dyke
Gregory
Myton
Newland
Orlit
Parkinson
Reema Hollow Panel
Schindler and Hawksley SGS
Stent
Stonecrete
Tarran
Underdown
Unity and Butterley
Waller
Wates
Wessex
Winget
Woolaway

The Hamish Cross and Stour types of dwelling are to be designated shortly.

My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment, Scotland and Wales have laid before the House an order under paragraph 2 of schedule 1 to the Act setting an expenditure limit, for the purpose of calculating the amount of reinstatement grant payable in each case, of £14,000 for all types of defective dwelling under the Act.

Owners of dwellings which are defective dwellings for the purposes of the Act will, from 1 December, be able to apply to their local housing authority for assistance under the Act. Owners will have 10 years from 1 December 1984

within which to apply for assistance. The Designations provide that the "cut off date" (ie, the date by which an owner must normally have bought his dwelling in order to be eligible for assistance under the Act) is to be 26 April 1984 for all types of prefabricated reinforced concrete house, except the Airey type, for which the "cut off date" is to be 8 September 1982.

A circular is being sent today to all local housing authorities in England and Wales about the Act and the scheme of assistance for owners of prefabricated reinforced concrete houses. I understand that a circular will be issued to local housing authorities in Scotland shortly.

The Department's discussions with the Building Societies Association and National House-Building Council about arrangements intended to enable building societies to lend with confidence on the security of repaired prefabricated reinforced concrete houses are continuing as a matter of urgency and I hope to be able to make a further announcement about them shortly.

Lee Valley Park

Mr. Haselhurst asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements will be made for the financing and membership of the Lee Valley regional park authority in the event of the Greater London council being abolished.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: After considering responses to the consultation paper on future arrangements for the Lee Valley regional park, I have decided that in the event of the GLC abolition, Greater London's share of the costs of the park should be split between the 32 boroughs and the City of London by way of a per capita levy, with the six riparian London boroughs (Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest), which already appoint one member each to the authority, making a double per capita contribution. I have also decided that the eight members of the authority at present appointed by the GLC should be replaced by eight members appointed by the 26 non-riparian boroughs and the City acting jointly. These changes to the Lee Valley Regional Park Act 1966 would be contained in an order laid before Parliament under powers to be included in the Local Government Bill to be introduced shortly.

I am concerned that the present statutory arrangements for the park, under which Greater London contributes 80 per cent. of the precept, even though only 36 per cent. of the park's area lies within the Greater London boundary, may not reflect a proper balance. Although fundamental changes would not be appropriate in the context of GLC abolition, I intend in due course to invite the various bodies concerned to consider whether legislation to change those arrangements should be promoted.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Subsidies and Purchases

Mr. Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will list the individuals and companies in the United Kingdom which have obtained a subsidy for crushing oilseed rape;

(2) whether he will give a list of the individuals and companies in the United Kingdom which have purchased butter from intervention;

(3) whether he will give a list of the individuals and companies in the United Kingdom which have purchased butter oil from intervention.

Mr. Jopling: No. It would be a breach of confidence to provide information on transactions between individuals or companies and the Intervention Board.

Straw Burning

Mr. Freeman asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps the Government propose to take to amend the present model byelaws governing straw and stubble burning so as to include oil seed rape.

Mr. Jopling: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I propose shortly to consult the local authority associations and other interested organisations on a separate scheme of model byelaws to regulate the burning of residues of oil seed rape and certain other crops. It is our intention that these byelaws should be available to local authorities in time for next year's burning season.

Hens' Eggs

Mr. Waller asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is his policy that the proposed amended regulations relating to the labelling of hens' eggs should require the declaration of methods of production.

Mr. MacGregor: Council Regulation (EEC) No. 1831/84 of 19 June 1984 provides for the optional declaration of method of production on retail packs. But such declarations may only make use of terms that have yet to be set out in a Commission regulation. My Department, in close consultation with the interests concerned, is seeking to play a constructive role in the discussions on the Commission regulation.

Milk (Direct Sales)

Mr. Nicholson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what volume of direct sales quota has been applied for in the United Kingdom; and how the total volume of valid claims compares with the official statistics for direct sales in the year from April 1983 to 31 March 1984 and in the calendar year 1981.

Mr. MacGregor: I regret that the volume of direct sales quota applied for in the United Kingdom is not yet available. A final figure will not be known until all applications for primary and for secondary quota have been considered, and the dairy produce quota tribunals has heard all appeals against awards of secondary quota made by local panels.

Statistics show that levels of recorded direct sales in the years in question were:

1981 calendar year 326·3 million litres
1983-84 marketing year 338·78 million litres

This reflects direct sales of producer processors, producer retailers farmhouse cheesemakers; farmhouse butter, certain cheeses, and cream are not reported.

Mr. Nicholson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps have been taken by Her Majesty's Government to check the authenticity of claims for direct sales quotas.

Mr. MacGregor: All producers who declared that they were engaged in direct sales on 2 April this year will,

prima facie, be eligible for registration and entitled to quota allocations. The dairy produce quotas regulations provide heavy penalties for making false or reckless statements to secure an allocation of quota, and Ministers may, following conviction for such offences, in addition, reduce quotas.

As part of normal administrative procedures, officials of my Department will be checking any inconsistencies found between details given in direct sellers' applications and existing information normally available to the Department.

Mr. Nicholson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the total volume of valid direct sales claims compares with the national direct sales quota.

Mr. MacGregor: I regret that it is not yet possible to assess the final figure of direct sales primary and secondary quota against the United Kingdom total quota allocation of 386·5 million litres, or 398,000 tonnes. The applications are still being processed.

Mr. Nicholson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the size of the national direct sales reserve; and what proportion of this volume arises from the surrender of direct sales quota by producers who have ceased direct selling.

Mr. MacGregor: The dairy produce quotas regulations 1984 provide that a direct sales reserve may be created from any quota not allocated to producers, and by such quota as may be given up by direct sellers.

Until all special case claims have been settled it is not possible to give direct sellers their final quota allocations and determine whether there is any unallocated quota to be placed in the reserve. Firm undertakings are now being received from producers who have applied and have been invited to give up direct sales quota under the outgoers' scheme which will provide the second element in the creation of a reserve.

Wholesale Milk Deliveries

Mr. Nicholson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what was the average percentage trend in wholesale milk deliveries between in determining the regional or provisional regional wholesale quotas published in the *London Gazette* on 25 July.

Mr. MacGregor: I regret that there is a typographical error in the Order Paper which means that I am unable to understand the question. I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible after it is corrected.

Mr. Nicholson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average percentage trend in wholesale milk deliveries between 1981 and 1983 in the United Kingdom; and what was the percentage trend in wholesale deliveries between 1981 and 1983 in each of the nine regions of the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: Between 1981 and 1983, wholesale milk deliveries in the United Kingdom increased by 9·14 per cent. For the same period the increase in England and Wales was 7·9 per cent. In Scotland, the increase was 11·63 per cent. In Northern Ireland the increase was 19·53 per cent. Detailed figures are not immediately available for the other regions and I hope to provide them shortly.

Mr. Nicholson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what mathematical basis the trends in wholesale milk deliveries were taken into account in determining the percentage reductions on 1983 wholesale deliveries in each of the nine regions of the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the evidence of my right hon. Friend to the House Agriculture Committee on 4 July 1984.

Milk (Volume)

Mr. Nicholson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportions of the volumes claimed relate to direct usage for pasteurised milk, untreated milk and for milk products.

Mr. MacGregor: The applications for direct sales quota are still being processed. While it is too early to give information requested, direct sellers have only been asked to provide details of liquid whole milk, skimmed milk, and semi-skimmed milk as well as of butter, cream or cheese sales in their base years.

Dairy Farms (Milk Quotas)

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the minimum period for which part or the whole of a dairy farm, with its appropriate proportion of the farm's milk quota, can be leased or rented to a third party, and then, at the termination of that lease, recovered by the lessor or landlord with its milk quota still intact.

Mr. MacGregor: The dairy produce quotas regulations (DI 1984/1047) specify no minimum period for a lease of the whole or part of a dairy holding with quota. However no quota is tranferred when a "minor change of occupation" takes place. A "minor change of occupation" is defined in the regulations as:

(a) the area occupation of which changes is less than—

(i) in respect of a holding in Northern Ireland, three quarters of the area of the holding as previously constituted (and also no larger than 40 hectares), and

(ii) in respect of a holding elsewhere, one quarter of the area of the remainder of the holding (and also no larger than 5 hectares), and

(b) the interest of the occupier who moves into that part of that holding is a tenancy or less than a tenancy and has a duration of less than one year—"

Poultry (Hygiene)

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, in discussions in the Council of Ministers on regulations governing the hygiene of poultry and the fees payable therefor, he will seek to harmonise standards before harmonising fees.

Mrs. Fenner: I agree with the objective stated by the hon. Member. However, if this is not immediately attainable, we are prepared to consider proposals on charging if these will help to remove distortions in competition between the poultrymeat industries of the Community.

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the bodies by which objections have been made to the Government's interpretation of the regulations governing poultrymeat hygiene; and if he will list the substance of such objections.

Mrs. Fenner: Since the Poulty Meat (Hygiene) Regulations were made in 1976 the Government have

discussed the interpretation of a number of aspects of the regulations with interested bodies, especially the British Poultry Federation. A complete list of issues covered is not readily available.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Nicholson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the amount of milk quota already purchased by Government from the buy-out scheme in each of the areas of the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: No milk quota has yet been purchased. The closing date for the return of the claim forms from the first tranche of producers who have been offered the chance to participate in the outgoers' scheme has only just passed.

Expenditure

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement concerning planned expenditure for agriculture, fisheries and food, in 1985 to 1986.

Mr. Jopling: As announced in the Chancellor's statement today, planned expenditure on agriculture, fisheries and food in 1985-86 will be £2249 million. This represents a net increase in support for the industries of £103 million over what was previously planned. Within this total, provision is made for additional expenditure of £189 million by the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce, mainly to finance the expected increase in intervention for cereals, partly offset by reduced expenditure of £58 million by the three Agriculture Departments on schemes pre-funded by the Community. The net increase in expenditure funded by the European Community amounts to £131 million.

The other expenditure in 1985-86 for which my agriculture colleagues and I are responsible, shows a net reduction of £36 million —4.2 per cent. of domestic expenditure and 1.7 per cent. of total expenditure on agriculture fisheries and food. Our main concern had been, taking account of changing circumstances and developments in the European Community, to ensure that the resources available for these programmes within total planned public expenditure are deployed in ways which will best serve the changing needs of the industry. In this connection, the future role of ADAS has recently been reviewed by the Director General and his report will be published tomorrow.

We shall be reducing expenditure under the capital grants schemes by about £40 million in 1985-86. The details will be given in orders which I shall shortly lay before Parliament. The changes in the schemes are designed to pave the way for the new measures which we expect to introduce in 1985 to implement a new EC structures regulation. They will take account of particular needs in the livestock sector and will further advance my intention to secure a better balance in these policies between agriculture and conservation. We shall also be making a reduction of £12 million in assistance for arterial drainage and flood protection. We intend to provide continued support for hill farming through livestock compensatory allowances extended to the newly designated areas and I shall be announcing the 1985 rates shortly. There will also be provision for the continuation of the enhanced rate of suckler cow subsidy I announced last April and for payments to producers under the milk outgoers's scheme, amounting together to some £20 million. The net outcome for domestic expenditure I refer to above takes account of these commitments and further adjustments.

Outgoers' Scheme

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of the £50 million expenditure to be made available for the milk supplementary levy (outgoers) scheme which he announced on 25 May; what adjustments are being made to cash limits to accommodate this expenditure; and whether any other change in cash limits is being proposed for the departmental votes for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Jopling: Payments under the milk supplementary levy (outgoers) scheme to producers discontinuing milk production for sale will be made in five equal annual instalments. Annual expenditure of £10 million will be distributed as follows:

£6,249,000 to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to meet expenditure arising in England;

£775,000 to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland;

£1,260,000 to the Welsh Office;

£1,716,000 to the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland.

Parliamentary approval for the first year's payments in England, Wales and Scotland will be sought in the winter Supplementary Estimates. For Northern Ireland, parliamentary approval will be sought in their autumn Supplementary Estimates. It is proposed to bring a Bill before the House shortly to give statutory effect to the scheme.

In addition to these changes, a winter Supplementary Estimate will also be presented for additional administrative expenditure by the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce on class III vote 2. This will seek provision to cover the additional work load arising from this year's CAP price fixing settlement, the record cereals harvest and the need for inspection facilities under the beef premium scheme. The increase will be offset by a transfer from class III, vote 4.

The consequent changes to cash limits are as follows:

£'000

Class	*Vote*	*Department*	*Original cash limit*	*Increase due to outgoers scheme*	*Other changes*	*Revised cash limit*
III	2	IBAP	19,481	—	*600	20,141
III	4	MAFF	143,545	6,249	*−660	149,134
XV	2	DAFS	61,235	775	†−2	62,008
XVI	5	WO	48,979	1,260	‡−2,482	47,757
NID1		Northern Ireland Departments	‖2,059·5	‖1·7	‖¶1·3	‖2,062·5

*Offsetting changes, as described above.

†Savings made following the abolition of National Insurance Surcharge.

‡The reduction results from savings on the Welsh Development Agency's grant in aid (−£2,500,000) required to offset additional expenditure on Selective Financial Assistance in class XVI, vote 3. It also incorporates the cost of dairy produce quota local panels (+£125,000), the surrender of excess appropriations in aid (−£90,000) and savings made following the abolition of national insurance surcharge (−£17,000).

‖Figures for Northern Ireland are rounded to the nearest £0·1 million.

¶Details of the funding of part of the increased cost to the NHS of recent pay awards are given by the Chief Secretary in a written answer of today's date.

Cash limit increases not offset by reductions are being charged to the Reserve.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Company Directors (National Insurance)

Mr. Wood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has completed his examination of personal liability of directors for national insurance contribution debts for their companies.

Mr. Fowler: I have examined carefully the special power contained in section 152(4) of the Social Security Act 1975, under which directors can become personally liable for the national insurance contribution debts of their company if they knew or should have known that the contributions were not being paid.

This power is not conferred on other revenue-collecting Departments. It has been criticised on the grounds that its use can result in exceptionally harsh personal financial penalties in certain circumstances; and that it may be a disincentive to directors to strive to save their companies, or may discourage the appointment of new directors where this might be in the interests of a company in difficulties.

I have decided that the use of section 152(4) is no longer justified and I intend to repeal it as soon as a suitable opportunity arises. This will bring my Department's powers into line with those of other revenue-collecting Departments, and it is my intention to keep in step with them in future.

From the date of this announcement, I propose to take no further action in any case in which my Department is currently involved.

Blind Persons

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many registered blind people there were in the United Kingdom in 1983.

Mr. Newton: As at 31 March 1982, the latest date for which information is centrally available for the United Kingdom as a whole, the total number of registered blind people was as follows:—

	Number
England	111,729
Wales	7,861
Scotland	11,259
United Kingdom	130,849

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the number of blind people who will receive less than they otherwise would have done in the November uprating of benefits because of the increase in the available scale margin; and if he will estimate the total saving to the Exchequer resulting from this.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many blind people will become subject to the £1 available scale margin reduction from their additional allowances under the supplementary benefit regulations on 26 November; what savings will result; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The available scale margin does not apply to the blindness addition or the age addition, nor does it affect those blind people who are in receipt of the short-term rate of supplementary benefit including those claiming as unemployed. For blind people on the long-term scale rate, the effect will vary according to the nature and extent of any payment they receive for additional requirements. I will write to the hon. Members with further information as soon as possible.

"Fares to Hospital"

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps are being taken to distribute the leaflet, "Fares to Hospital", in rural areas.

Mr. Whitney: The leaflet "Fares to Hospital" is widely distributed to health authorities and family practitioner committees for issue to hospitals and general practitioners' surgeries in both rural and urban areas. It is also available in local DHSS offices and in many citizens' advice bureaux.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will now extend the long-term rate of supplementary benefit to the unemployed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The necessary resources of about £500 million are not available to implement this proposal, which in any case raises wider questions about the supplementary benefit scheme more properly considered in the current social security review.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what change is to be made after the uprating on 26 November in the amount that is deemed to be paid by a trade union to its members on strike in the course of a dispute, which is then deducted from any supplementary benefit paid to such families.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the proposals for increased surveillance and fraud investigation of supplementary benefit claimants who use postal applications to claim benefit.

Mr. Newton: We have no such proposals at present.

Mr. Burt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to receive the report of the Social Security Advisory Committee on the Supplementary

Benefit (Single Payments) Regulations 1984, regarding single payments for furniture; and when it will be published.

Mr. Whitney: I understand that the Social Security Advisory Committee expects to finalise its report to my right hon. Friend on the Supplementary Benefit (Single Payments) Regulations 1984 regarding single payments for furniture before the end of the year. The report is required under the Social Security Act 1980 to be laid before Parliament, but decisions on the timing of publication will be taken when my right hon. Friend has considered his response which will be published with the report.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many extra supplementary benefit recipients in receipt of additional allowances will become subject to the £1 available scale margin reduction as a consequence of the change in the regulations on 26 November; what savings will result; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Dr. Boyson) to the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) on 21 June at columns *242-3*.

Child Benefit

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will now phase out the disparities in child benefit rates between war widows and other widows by bringing them up to the higher level for both and make suitable transitional arrangements.

Mr. Newton: The rates of child benefit are the same for all. I assume the hon. Member has in mind the child dependency additions paid to widowed mothers and other long-term beneficiaries. We have no plans to raise these to the preferential rate paid to war widows.

National Council for Care of Elderly Dependants

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what changes in Government funding have occurred in 1984-85 and are planned for 1985-86 for the National Council for Care of Elderly Dependants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We are currently considering an application from the council for a grant of £20,000 this year. We expect to reach a decision very soon.

NHS (Manpower)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people were employed in the National Health Service in England and Wales at the latest date; what were the corresponding figures for June 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The total number of NHS directly employed staff in England at 31 March 1984 (the latest date for which an overall total is available) was 819,100 (whole-time equivalent). Figures are not available for June 1979, since quarterly staffing returns had not been introduced at that time. The corresponding figure for September 1979 was 773,300. Details of the figures are in the Library.

Statistics on the NHS in Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people were employed by the Mersey regional health authority at the latest date; what was the corresponding figure for June 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The total number of NHS directly employed staff in Mersey RHA at 31 March 1984 (the latest date for which an overall total is available) was 43,900 (whole time equivalents). No figures are available for June 1979 since quarterly staffing returns had not been introduced at that time. The corresponding figure for September 1979 (which was the annual collection date) was 43,300.

Notes:

1. The figures quoted include agency nursing staff and locum medical and dental staff. They exclude hospital practitioners, part-time medical officers (clinical assistants), general medical practitioners participating in hospital staff funds and occasional sessional staff in community health services.
2. The latest date for which a count of total NHS staff in England is available is March 1984, since information on medical and dental staff is not collected quarterly.

Depo Provera

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, in the light of the findings of the United States Food and Drugs Administration, he will review the continued use of Depo Provera; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received concerning repayment of mobility allowance wrongly withdrawn in the light of the Commissioner's decision R (M) 2/82; what reply he has sent; and if he will make a further statement.

Mr. Newton: I expect to be in a position to reply soon to a letter from the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation on this matter and I will also write to the right hon. Member.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) for each of the past five years how many applicants who were claiming mobility allowance succeeded in their claim on their first application;

(2) how many claims for mobility allowance have been made for each of the past five years;

(3) in each of the past five years how many claims for mobility allowance in England and Wales have been made by or on behalf of physically handicapped people;

(4) over each of the past five years what was the average time required for each stage of a mobility allowance claim (physically and mentally handicapped) to be processed;

(5) how many applicants who claimed for mobility allowance did not appeal after an initial refusal during each of the past five years;

(6) how many applicants succeeded in their claims for a mobility allowance after an appeal to the medical board in each of the last five years;

(7) how many applicants succeeded in their claims for a mobility allowance after an appeal to the medical appeal tribunal over each of the past five years;

(8) what guidance is given to the doctors who make assessments for mobility allowance;

(9) what proportion of applications for mobility allowance are successful, broken down by city or region in each of the last five years;

(10) how many claims for mobility allowance have been made by or on behalf of mentally handicapped people for each of the past five years.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Mental Health Act Commission

Mr. Stan Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he has been able to assess the value of the work of the north-west region Mental Health Act commission following its first year of operation;

(2) if it is his intention to centralise the secretariat of the Mental Health Act commission;

(3) whether he proposes to change the existing adminstrative arrangements for the Mental Health Act commission regarding the maintenance of an adequately staffed regional office in the north-west;

(4) whether he will consider extending the role of the Mental Health Act commission to include the investigation of complaints from informal patients, particularly those who are effectively detained though still informal and those who complain about alleged coercive or restrictive practices.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Stan Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what special hospitals are covered by the north-west region of the Mental Health Act commission.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Moss Side hospital and Park Lane hospital.

Mr. Stan Thorne asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the annual budget of the Mental Health Act commission is expended on section 58 second opinion medical fees.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Expenditure on second opinion medical fees is currently running at about 14 per cent. of the commission's annual budget.

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the preparation of the code of practice by the Mental Health Act commission; and when he intends to publish it.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people received a rate rebate through standard or certified housing benefit in the last full year for which figures are available.

Mr. Whitney: It is estimated that in autumn 1983, the latest date for which information is available, there were 3,070,000 certificated cases and 3,660,000 standard cases receiving rate rebates.

Doctors

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many doctors were unemployed in England and Wales at the latest available date; and what were the corresponding figures for June 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many doctors were employed in the National Health Service in England and Wales at the latest date; what were the figures for June 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: At 30 September 1983, the latest available date, there were some 43,400* doctors directly employed in the NHS in England. This includes locums but excludes hospital practitioners and doctors with paragraph 94 appointments, most of whom were general practitioners employed on a part-time basis in the hospital service. A comparable figure for 30 September 1979 is 40,300 but figures for June 1979 are not available. In addition there were some 25,300 general medical practitioners providing services under contract to the NHS in England on 1 October 1983, and 23,100 on the same date in 1979.

Statistics on the NHS in Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

*All figures rounded to the nearest 10.

Health Authorities (Appointments)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list those bodies and organisations he has consulted with regard to appointments to each of the regional health authorities.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We always consider recommendations for appointments which reach us from any source and in particular from many hon. Members on both sides of the House. Many individuals put themselves forward as candidates and some of these prove suitable for appointment. However, in accordance with the National Health Service Act 1977 we have also consulted the relevant local authorities, universities, representatives of the main health professions, federations of workers organisations, other appropriate local interested or voluntary bodies and the regional health authority itself. The following national bodies or organisations have also been consulted.

Association of Independent Hospitals
Association of Nurse Administrators
Association of Optical Practitioners
British Dental Association
British Homoeopathic Association
British Medical Association
British Red Cross
Commission for Racial Equality
Confederation of British Industry
Confederation of Health Service Employees
Conservative and Unionist Party
Faculty of Anaesthetists
Faculty of Community Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians
Faculty of Dental Surgery
Faculty of Homoeopathy
Faculty of Ophthalmologists
Health Visitors Association
Homoeopathic Trust
Independent Hospital Group Ltd.
Institute of Directors

Institute of Personnel Management
Labour Party
Liberal Party Organisation
Management Administrative and Technical Supervisory Association
Managerial, Professional and Staff Liaison Group
National Association for Mental Health
National and Local Government Officers Association
National Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations
National Society for Mentally Handicapped Children
National Union of Public Employees
Overseas Doctors Association
Patients Association
Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain
Registered Nursing Homes Association
Royal College of General Practitioners
Royal College of Midwives
Royal College of Nursing
Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
Royal College of Pathologists
Royal College of Psychiatrists
Royal College of Radiologists
Royal College of Surgeons
St. John's Ambulance Association
Trades Union Congress
Women's Royal Voluntary Service

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many chairmen and members of district and regional health authorities have sent letters of resignation to him, citing as their reason dissatisfaction with Government policies, particularly with regard to privatisation.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: A few letters of resignation have included parting messages about particular concerns. We welcome constructive critical comment from health authority chairmen and members on any occasion including even their resignations.

Retrolental Fibroplasia

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the current incidence of retrolental fibroplasia amongst newborn babies whose birth was premature; and how this compares with past trends.

Mr. John Patten: Details of the incidence and past trends of retrolental fibroplasia cannot be identified accurately from the statistical information collected centrally. I will write to the hon. Member.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he is considering any proposals to change the numbers of community health council members or the ways in which they are appointed.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the amount of funding by each regional health authority for community health councils for each of the past five years; and what has been the overall average allocation to community health councils for each of the past five years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect information centrally on the funds allocated by regional health authorities to community health councils. Actual expenditure by the councils, as recorded in the annual accounts submitted by health authorities to the Department, is shown in the table. It is not possible to give an average figure for 1981-82 and 1982-83, as the number of councils changed during those years because of NHS restructuring.

Community Health Councils: Expenditure

£'000

Region	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	**1983-84*
Northern	339	377	400	448	476
Yorkshire	284	354	393	434	450
Trent	316	385	402	414	435
East Anglian	141	175	187	215	240
North-West Thames	387	492	542	570	582
North-East Thames	375	445	504	536	525
South-East Thames	283	359	398	422	423
South-West Thames	294	345	395	391	413
Wessex	175	225	234	249	265
Oxford	168	204	210	257	264
South Western	272	326	346	375	440
West Midlands	409	520	574	627	667
Mersey	230	274	301	318	320
North Western	358	453	482	531	599
ENGLAND TOTAL	4,031	4,934	5,368	5,787	6,099
Overall average expenditure per council	20	24	—	—	31

* Provisional figures.

Children (Growth)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he intends to take following his Department's national study, "Current Social Factors and the Growth of Pre-School Children", about height in one and two year-old children of the long-term unemployed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: A survey of pre-school children, undertaken for the Department and the Scottish Home and Health Department by the department of human nutrition at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, has examined possible associations between a number of biological and social variables, including unemployment, and the attained height of one and two year old children.

The researchers state that no causal relationship can be claimed between any particular variable and attained height. A synopsis of the findings is due to be published next year as part of the third report on nutritional surveillance from the chief medical officer's committee on medical aspects of food policy.

Mortality Levels

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he intends to take following the results of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys longitudinal study about mortality levels in unemployed men and their wives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: As stated in a reply given on 31 October at column *1085*, this study was carried out by a research team based at the City university, as part of a programme of work financed by the Medical Research Council to analyse data compiled by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

I understand that a paper presenting some results from the study is to be published in a few weeks' time, in a medical journal. Ministers will carefully consider the findings once they have been published.

Disabled Persons (Discrimination)

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of alleged discrimination against disabled people have been received by his Department since 18 November 1983; what was the nature of the investigations undertaken into these cases; what was the outcome of these investigations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Since 18 November 1983, eight cases have been referred with sufficient evidence for us to investigate. In one case we are still awaiting confirmation that the individual concerned wished inquiries to be made on her behalf. In the remaining seven cases officials have made inquiries and sought the comments of the other parties involved. Three cases are still under consideration. Of the four concluded cases:

- one involved a genuine problem of access;
- one concerned an employer's judgment that the complainant's disability rendered her unsuitable for the appointment in question on safety grounds;
- one concerned the general rules of membership of a trade federation which are applicable to all candidates;
- one concerned a management judgment that an employee's overall performance, even after taking account of the limitation imposed by disability, was inadequate for promotion purposes.

In my judgment none of these cases revealed evidence of unjustified discrimination.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Social Services in view of the fact that no strike pay has been paid to members of the National Union of Mineworkers during the coal mining dispute, if he will now direct his Department's branches to pay the £15 per week that has been denied them since March.

Mr. Newton: The deduction of £15 from any supplementary benefit payable for the dependants of a person involved in a trade dispute is required by section 6 of the Social Security (No. 2) Act 1980. The intention is that the taxpayer should not have to bear the full cost of supporting strikers' families; either strikers themselves or their union should make some provision to maintain dependants. The deduction does not therefore depend upon payment of strike pay, nor is strike pay deemed to be in payment.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what conditions laid down by his Department miners and the families of miners engaged in industrial dispute must satisfy in order to receive exemptions from prescription charges.

Mr. Newton: The conditions of eligibility for free prescriptions are the same for strikers as for any other persons or families. These are age (children up to 16 or pensioners), certain specified illness and war disabilities, expectant and nursing mothers, and low income.

Departmental Staff (Retirements)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether any staff of his Department at or above the level of assistant secretary have retired early; and whether any such staff have since been re-engaged either permanently or to carry out a specific task.

Mr. Fowler: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Specialist Claims Control

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the results of his investigation into the methods for calculating savings from the work of specialist claims control.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Cancer Patients (Prescription Charges)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Social Services if he will list the circumstances under which exemptions from prescription charges for those suffering from cancer can be obtained.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Exemption from prescription charges is available to people in the following groups, all of which may include individuals suffering from cancer:

1. Children under 16.
2. Men aged 65 or over and women aged 60 or over.
3. Pregnant women or women who have had a baby within the preceding 12 months.
4. People who get supplementary benefit, family income supplement or housing benefit supplement, their partners and dependants.
5. War or service pensioners (for items for their accepted disablement only).
6. People who qualify on low income grounds, their partners and dependants.
7. People who have—
   i. a permanent fistula (including caecostomy, colostomy, laryngostomy or ileostomy) requiring continuous surgical dressing or an appliance;
   ii. one of the following disorders for which specific substitution therapy is essential:
   Addison's disease and other forms of hypoadrenalism,
   diabetes insipidus and other forms of hypopituitarism,
   diabetes mellitus,
   hypoparathyroidism,
   myasthenia gravis,

myxoedema;

iii. epilepsy requiring continuous anti-convulsive therapy;

iv. a continuing physical disability which prevents the patient from leaving his residence without the help of another person.

NHS (Charges)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what he expects the total income from Health Service charges to be in 1984-85; and if he will estimate the income for 1985-86, assuming *(a)* no increases and *(b)* 12·5 per cent. increases;

(2) what is the proportion of Health Service expenditure covered by charges in 1984-85; and if he will estimate the proportion for 1985-86, assuming *(a)* no increases and *(b)* 12·5 per cent. increases.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The estimated total income from health service charges in 1984-85 is about £425 million. This represents approximately 3 per cent. of total Health Service expenditure. The estimates requested for 1985-86 are not available.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate how many persons over 16 years, and under pensionable age, are liable to pay prescription charges; and if he will estimate this as a percentage of the population in these age groups.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: People in the age ranges specified may qualify for exemption if:

they are in receipt of supplementary benefit, family income supplement or housing benefit supplement or are the partner or dependant of someone who is; or

they qualify on low income grounds or are the partner or dependant of someone who does; or

they are pregnant or have had a baby within the preceding 12 months; or

they are war pensioners (where the exemption covers items prescribed for the accepted disablement only); or

they suffer from a medical condition included in a limited list of conditions leading to exemption.

In addition, contraceptive substances and appliances are supplied without charge.

There is no reliable way of estimating the proportion of the population which might at any given time be entitled to exemption under these arrangements.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the real increase in prescription charges after allowing for inflation in the years 1979 to 1984 for each category of Health Service charges.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Health Authorities (Regional Strategic Plans)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has advised regional health authorities as to the reasonable time to be allowed for public consultation on a regional strategic plan.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. This is a matter for health authorities.

Broadmoor Hospital

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the redevelopment of Broadmoor hospital, Berkshire.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Broadmoor hospital is being completely redeveloped on its existing site. Following completion of certain advance works, construction of the first stage of the redevelopment of Broadmoor hospital started in February 1984. This stage, which comprises a new ward block, medical centre, central kitchen and stores, administration offices and gatehouse, is due for completion in Autumn 1986. Design work is proceeding on the second stage, which consists of two further ward blocks and an occupations/education complex. Construction is planned to start shortly after work on the first stage is completed. Further stages are planned to follow leading to completion of the new hospital in about 1997.

DEFENCE

Western European Union

Mr. Christopher Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Government policy following the Rome declaration on the future of the Western European Union.

Mr. Renton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) on 31 October, when I said that we have been working actively with our partners in the Western European Union to find ways of making better use of the organisation. We fully support the declaration and the document outlining institutional improvements which were agreed by Foreign and Defence Ministers at their meeting in Rome on 27 October and welcome their decision to meet regularly together within the WEU framework.

None of the measures which are to be taken to revitalise the WEU is intended to duplicate or undermine the Atlantic Alliance, which remains the foundation of our security. The activities of WEU can, however, help to bring about a stronger and more cohesive contribution to NATO from its members and increase public understanding of the European defence role within the alliance.

Ministry of Defence Stores (Fire Protection)

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Defence if it is his intention that automatic sprinkler protection will be incorporated in new and existing Ministry of Defence stores, containing exceptionally valuable and combustible items.

Mr. Lee: Yes, where this is regarded as appropriate.

Armed Services Youth Training Scheme

Sir Antony Buck asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether there are any plans to allow women to be offered places in the Army's armed services youth training scheme.

Mr. Stanley: I am pleased to say that the Army is now able to offer places to young women as well as to young men and 50 places are being offered on training courses

starting in February and March next year for training as supply controllers, drivers, switchboard operators, postal and courier operators, and kennelmaids and grooms.

This brings the Army into line with the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force which already offer places to young women in the armed services youth training scheme.

United States Forces (Exercises)

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether United States forces in the United Kingdom have taken part in exercises in accordance with the joint United States Army-United States air force memorandum of understanding entitled, "Efforts for Enhancement of Joint Employment of the Airland Battle Doctrine," agreed on 21 April 1983.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether units of the United States air force based in Britain require formal agreement from his Department before conducting national exercises.

Mr. Stanley: Not normally.

NATO (Nuclear Planning Group)

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement on any agreements reached at the recent meeting of NATO's nuclear planning group.

Mr. Stanley: A summary of the NATO nuclear planning group meeting at Stresa on 11-12 October 1984 is contained in the final communiqué, a copy of which is in the Library.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Young asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel are on their second, third or any subsequent tour in the Falklands; how many of them *(a)* are in receipt of the Falklands allowance and *(b)* are not; and if he will consider changing the rules relating to the payment of the allowances payable after a certain number of days in the Falklands in that or any subsequent tour.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Mr. Young asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many ships are on hire to Her Majesty's Government for work in the Falklands; and what is the cost, term and company concerned of each contract.

Mr. Stanley: There are currently 10 ships on charter for work in the Falklands. They are as follows:

Name	*Company*	*Charter Dates*	
SS Uganda	P & O	3 January 1983	27 April 1985
MV Ice Lark	Sea Lion	6 February 1983	6 February 1986
MV Skeldergate	Turnbull Scott	25 January 1984	24 January 1985
MV Lumiere	Cunard	1 March 1984	31 August 1985
MV Irishman	United Towing	1 March 1983	15 April 1985
MV Oil Mariner	Ocean Inchcape	16 April 1983	28 February 1985
MV Scottish Eagle	Cayzer Irving	5 January 1984	5 July 1985
MV Maersk Harrier	Maersk London	5 December 1983	30 June 1985
MV British Tamar	BP Shipping	1 April 1984	31 December 1984
MV St Angus	Gardners	30 April 1984	29 April 1985

Costs paid to the owner of a chartered vessel are a commercially confidential matter between the Ministry of Defence and the owner concerned.

Boarding School Allowance Scheme

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the procedure by which a child educated under the boarding school allowance scheme for the children of Her Majesty's forces can move to another school than that orignally selected; and if he will specify what the implications of such a move are for receipt of the boarding school allowance.

Mr. Lee: Payment of boarding school allowance is normally conditional upon a child continuing to attend the school for which it was first authorised. The allowance regulations recognise that changes of school are necessary on completion of a stage of education, that is primary or secondary. Other changes of school may continue to attract payment of the allowance in certain circumstances, for example, ill-health, significant increase of school fees or significant alteration of a school's curriculum or standards. Cases which fail to satisfy these criteria are referred to the Ministry of Defence for decision and may result in forfeiture of future entitlement to the allowance and/or refund in part or whole of the allowance already paid for that stage of education. Each case is however considered on its merits; subject of course to compliance with the regulations.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will list the number of children of Her Majesty's forces educated under the boarding school allowance scheme who changed school from that originally selected in each of the last 10 years; and whether he will list the schools involved under the heading used by his Department to record the reasons for such moves.

Mr. Lee: Some 21,500 children of service parents are educated under the boarding school allowance scheme but the Ministry of Defence does not maintain records of changes of school and the number of children affected. This information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The majority of changes of school arise on completion of a stage of education that is, cessation of primary schooling and commencement of the secondary stage. Other changes that arise are considered separately on their merits but the numbers involved are a small proportion of the whole.

Service Personnel (Schoolchildren)

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Defence how a decision is made on the suitability of a school for children of service personnel whose fees are paid in part or in full by Her Majesty's services; and what arrangements are made to ensure the continuing suitability of any such school.

Mr. Lee: The onus for deciding which school a service man's child should attend rests firmly on the parent. Among the factors that he should consider are that the school chosen is within his means, that it can provide continuity of education for a stage of education ie primary/secondary and that satisfactory arrangement exist for the child's welfare wherever he might be serving. He can obtain advice and assistance in making the choice from his local education officer who will usually recommend that he visits the chosen school before his child is entered. However the school chosen must be registered with the appropriate United Kingdom Department of Education and additionally the school authority or local education authority must manage, control and wholly maintain the facilities for the board and accommodation of the child.

Records are maintained of boarding schools attended by children of service parents and schools are visited periodically by officers of the Service Childrens Education Authority. Any cases of dissatisfaction with a particular school registered by individual parents are investigated by SCEA who may refer the matter to the appropriate United Kingdom Department of education.

School Fees

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will describe the arrangements by which Her Majesty's forces pay school fees for children being educated in the United Kingdom, indicating the number of schools and the number of children involved in such arrangements in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Lee: The payment of school fees in respect of service men's children attending boarding schools in the United Kingdom is the responsibility of the parent. To assist in payment of those fees, boarding school allowance, within the approved limits is paid to the parent in advance separately for each school term on production of the requisite school bill. In the majority of cases, the allowance payable does not cover the full cost of the school fees.

A recent survey of boarding schools established that some 21,500 children of service parents attended approximately 800 different schools. Similar records are not maintained for previous years and this information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

RAF Trainer

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, in the selection of a new trainer for the Royal Air Force, he will beware of claims for unproven aircraft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butler: We have received four tenders for a new RAF trainer and they will all be the subject of a very thorough technical and financial evaluation before a final selection is made.

Sir Patrick Wall asked the the Secretary of State for Defence when he will be making a decision for the replacement for the Jet Provost for Royal Air Force training.

Mr. Butler: It is hoped to announce a decision around the turn of the year.

Follow-on Force Attack

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he supports the adoption of the follow-on force attack concept by NATO.

Mr. Stanley: Yes, we support the adoption of the follow-on force attack concept by NATO for the reasons given in my answer to the hon. Lady on 29 October 1984 at col. 856-57, and in my speech in the House on 31 October 1984 at col. 1384-88.

Airland Battle Doctrine

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has made representations to the United States Government asking them to withdraw the airland battle doctrine from their European commands.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence in what way the United States airland battle doctrine is incompatible with NATO doctrine.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the airland battle doctrine has been discussed by NATO ambassadors in the defence planning committee.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Warrior Preparation Centre

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any British officer has taken part in exercises at the United States European command Warrior Preparation Centre.

Mr. Stanley: Only as observers.

Pershing II

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the description by the United States Army of its Pershing II missile as a weapon for fire support is a description used by NATO.

Mr. Stanley: Pershing II is not regarded by NATO as a fire support weapon in the normal NATO usage of that term.

NATO Defence Ministers (Meeting)

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence when and where is the next meeting of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Defence Ministers.

Mr. Stanley: NATO's Defence Planning Committee will next meet in ministerial session in Brussels in December.

Procurement Contracts

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the percentage of procurement contracts placed

by his Department directly with firms employing up to 200 employees in the last 12 months or other convenient period; and if he will break down this percentage between sea, land, air and general support functions.

Mr. Butler: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) to my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) on 24 May at columns *552-53*. The exercise currently in hand regarding the percentage of direct contracts placed with smaller firms covers the year to 31 March 1985. The results will not be available until the middle of next year.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the duties of the Ministry of Defence police; to whom the chief constable of the Ministry of Defence police reports; and what complaints procedure exists for matters relating to the actions of this force.

Mr. Lee: It is the duty of the Ministry of Defence Police to protect and police Ministry of Defence establishments and to protect Crown property. The chief constable reports to the second permanent under-secretary of state. In common with other police forces in England and Wales the Ministry of Defence police are subject to the complaints procedure which was established by the Police Act 1976.

Services Medical Organisation (Equipment)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the catalogue of medical equipment used within the Services Medical Organisation.

Mr. Lee: The "British Joint Services Catalogue of Medical Equipment" is a classified internal Ministry of Defence document. For this reason it would not be appropriate to place a copy in the House of Commons Library.

Drugs (Prescribing and Dispensing)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will estimate the potential savings to be made from the generic prescribing and dispensing of drugs in the armed services;

(2) if it is his policy to promote generic prescribing and dispensing of drugs in the armed services.

Mr. Lee: It has long been Ministry of Defence policy to insist on generic dispensing of drugs, whatever the prescription, when a generic equivalent of the item prescribed exists. The Ministry of Defence therefore, already achieves the full economies of generic dispensing and there are consequently no further potential savings in this respect.

Switzerland (Purchases)

Sir Patrick Wall asked the Secretary of State for Defence what military purchases have been made from the United Kingdom by Switzerland since 1954.

Mr. Butler: Substantial purchases have been made, but it has been the practice of successive Administrations not to publicise details of individual defence sales contracts.

HMS Conqueror (Log Book)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the rank of the most senior officer known to have seen the log book of HMS Conqueror after it left the ship.

Mr. Heseltine: That is a matter for the board of inquiry.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the terms of reference of the court of inquiry into the loss of the log book of HMS Conqueror; and by when and to whom it is to report.

Mr. Heseltine: The board of inquiry is to inquire into the circumstances attending the apparent disappearance of Conqueror's control room log. It will report to the Commander in Chief Fleet when it has reached its findings.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Defence when the loss of the navigator's log book of HMS Conqueror was first discovered; and by whom the loss was notified.

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Defence when was the loss of the log book from HMS Conqueror first discovered; and by whom.

Mr. Heseltine: The first indications that the control room log could be missing appeared in the first week of October when an official in my Department asked to see it in the context of answering parliamentary inquiries.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will call in the Metropolitan Police to investigate the loss of the log book from HMS Conqueror.

Mr. Heseltine: The disappearance of HMS Conqueror's log is being investigated by a Royal Navy board of inquiry. Until its report is available, no consideration can be given as to whether the Metropolitan police should be involved.

Nuclear Submarines (Log Books)

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the security classification of the navigator's log book on nuclear submarines.

Mr. Heseltine: Once entries have been made in the control room log kept by the navigating officer of a nuclear submarine this document is classified confidential.

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place a copy of a navigator's log book of a nuclear submarine in the Library for inspection by hon. Members.

Mr. Heseltine: I have placed a copy of an uncompleted control room log for a submarine in the House of Commons Library.

FH 70 Ammunition

Mr. McWilliam asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received any representations from the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany regarding possible later delivery by that Government of FH 70 ammunition.

Mr. Butler: No.

Mr. McWilliam asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether, under the 1970 three country

arrangement between the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany and Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany has now successfully manufactured the FH 70 shell.

Mr. Butler: Final qualification of the German shell line is expected shortly.

West Germany (Shell-filling Capacity)

Mr. McWilliam asked the Secretary of State for Defence what financial contribution Her Majesty's Government are making toward the cost of the Federal Republic of Germany's shell-filling facility.

Mr. Butler: None.

120 F/S Shot

Mr. McWilliam asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to place an order for 120 F/S shot.

Mr. Butler: We hope to place an order very shortly.

Fighting Ships (Log Books)

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many log books of fighting ships of the Royal Navy have been lost since May 1979; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of the ships concerned and the date when the log books were reported missing.

Mr. Heseltine: I am arranging for a check to be made that no log books have been mislaid, apart from those from HMS Conqueror which I reported to the House on Wednesday 7 November. I will write to the hon. Member when the check is complete. No log books have been reported missing.

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether navigator's log books of fighting ships of the Royal Navy are always classified documents.

Mr. Heseltine: Once entries have been made in submarine log books these books are classified. Navigation log books for surface ships are unclassified.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 13 November 1984

PRIME MINISTER

Soviet Embassy (Ministerial Visits)

Mr. Spearing asked the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's policy with regard to the attendance of Ministers at functions at the Soviet embassy in London; and what changes have recently been made in that policy.

The Prime Minister: Ministers attend functions at the Soviet Embassy where there is a substantive reason for them to do so. Our policy has been, and remains, to have high-level and ministerial contacts with the Russians when these are deemed advantageous.

UNESCO

Q6. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Prime Minister whether, in the opinion of Her Majesty's Government, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation is now properly managed in accordance with its original ideals.

The Prime Minister: No. Some improvements have been agreed this year but we believe more needs to be done.

Regional Aid

Q38. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Prime Minister whether she is satisfied with the co-operation between the Scottish Office and the Department of Trade and Industry over the review of regional aid.

The Prime Minister: Yes. The review of regional economic policy has involved all the Departments concerned including the Scottish Office.

Perinatal Mortality

Q42. **Mrs. Renée Short** asked the Prime Minister if she is satisfied with the rate of progress in the reduction of the perinatal mortality rate.

The Prime Minister: I am greatly encouraged by the improvement that is being made. The perinatal mortality rate in England and Wales has fallen by almost a third over the past five years. The rates for Scotland and Northern Ireland are also falling in line with this trend. There is every reason to believe that they will fall yet further.

United Nations

Q76. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Prime Minister when she next plans to visit the United Nations.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to visit the United Nations.

Ethiopia

Q85. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement about food aid to Ethiopia.

The Prime Minister: Food aid has been promised by many different countries, most recently and generously by the United States which is giving 130,000 tonnes. We expect to ship the 6,500 tonnes we have promised to arrive by mid-December, making 26,500 tonnes provided in all over the last year. The European Community has allotted over 117,000 tonnes of cereals to Ethiopia over the same period, as well as other products. On 6 November the Council of Ministers endorsed proposals for a further 100,000 tonnes to drought-stricken countries in Africa, including Ethiopia. Our Community partners have also individually committed more than another 30,000 tonnes in response to the drought.

Bradford

Q90. **Mr. Madden** asked the Prime Minister if she has any plans to pay an official visit to Bradford.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Liverpool

Q115. **Mr. Heffer** asked the Prime Minister when she next intends to visit Liverpool; and if she will make a statement on her visit to the city during early October.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

As to a statement on my visit in October, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave at column 539 on Tuesday 23 October to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry).

Engagements

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 November.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 13 November.

Mr. Shersby asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 November.

Mr. Marlow asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 November.

Mr. Gould asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 November.

Mr. Leigh asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I shall preside at a dinner in honour of President Koivisto of Finland.

EC (Council of Prime Ministers)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she is satisfied with the preparations made for the next meeting of the Common Market Council of Prime Ministers.

The Prime Minister: Yes. The Irish Presidency is continuing with arrangements for the European Council to be held in the Republic on 3-4 December.

Aberdare

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Aberdare.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Indecent and Obscene Material

Mr. Wheeler asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a detailed statement setting out the guidance given to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise officers so as to enable an officer to exercise his judgment when deciding to detain imported material considered indecent or obscene.

Mr. Hayhoe: All officers engaged on customs work undergo a period of training and their course covers all aspects of import prohibitions including that on indecent or obscene material. However, Customs do not rely on one person's judgment alone and any case where there is doubt or where the decision is queried is submitted to a specialist branch in their headquarters. This branch carefully monitors court decisions on what is currently regarded as indecent or obscene and is guided by them. It also ensures that local staff are kept fully aware of contemporary interpretation of the law. Importers of course have the right to challenge any particular decision on alleged indecency or obsenity in the Courts.

Mr. Wheeler asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out for the most recent 12-month period the number of seizures of presumed indecent or obscene material; and what were the figures for each of the previous five years.

Mr. Hayhoe: It is regretted that the information is not readily available.

"Building Societies: A New Framework"

Mr. Evennett asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what responses he has received to the Green Paper, "Building Societies: A New Framework"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on 31 October 1984 at column *1069*. A list of those individuals and organisations who have responded to the Green Paper is as follows:

Building Societies (62)
- Building Societies Association
- Abbey National
- Anglia
- Bedford
- Bradford and Bingley
- Bristol & West
- Britannia
- Bolton
- Buckinghamshire
- Chatham Reliance
- Chelsea
- Cheltenham & Gloucester
- Citizens Regency
- Civil Service
- Colchester
- Ecology
- Earl Shilton
- East Surrey
- Essex Equitable
- Halifax
- Hanley Economic
- Hampshire
- Harrow
- Haywards Heath
- Hemel Hempstead
- Herne Bay
- Herts & Essex
- Hinckley and Rugby
- Holmesdale Benefit
- Ilkeston Permanent
- Ipswich
- Kidderminster Equitable
- Lambeth
- Leeds Permanent
- Leek United and Midlands
- Mansfield
- Market Harborough
- Mid-Sussex
- Monmouthshire
- National Counties
- Nationwide
- Newbury
- North Wilts Ridgeway
- Northern Rock
- Nottingham Oddfellows
- Paddington
- Peckham
- Peterborough
- Portsmouth
- Principality
- Rowley Regis
- Saffron Walden & Essex
- Scarborough
- Sheffield
- Shepshed
- Staffordshire
- Stroud
- Sussex County
- Universal
- Wessex
- West Cumbria
- Woolwich Equitable

Other Financial Sector (13)
- British Bankers Association
- Committee of London Clearing Banks
- Finance Houses Association
- TSB Group
- County Bank
- British Insurance Association
- British Insurance Brokers Association
- Corporation of Finance Brokers
- Norwich Union Insurance Group
- Orion Insurance Company
- Royal Life Insurance
- Sun Alliance Insurance Group
- Hoare Govett

Surveyors/Estate Agents (18)
- Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
- Incorporated Society of Valuers and Auctioneers
- National Association of Estate Agents
- Balch Chartered Surveyors
- Beadle Lane Associates
- Black Horse Agencies
- Carter Hope Associates
- John M Conlin Chartered Surveyor
- Elms Chartered Surveyors
- Alastair Gibson Chartered Surveyor
- David Gould Chartered Surveyor
- Jacksons Estate Agents
- MBJ Surveyors

Edward Payne & Veness Chartered Surveyor
David Perkins (Estate Agent)
Mervyn J Roberts Chartered Surveyor
Victor B Side Chartered Surveyors
J & E Shepherd Chartered Surveyors

Legal Profession (1)
The Law Society of Scotland

Office of Fair Trading (1)

Accountancy Profession (5)
Association of Certified Accountants
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales
Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland
Thornton Baker

Consumer Bodies (3)
Consumers' Association
National Consumer Council
National Federation of Consumer Groups

Housing Industry (4)
The Housing Corporation
House-Builders Federation
National Federation of Housing Association
Coastal Counties Housing Association Limited

Local Authorities (3)
Association of District Councils
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Lambeth Borough Council

Trade Unions/Staff Associations (6)
Trades Union Congress
Clearing Bank Union
Federation of Building Society Staff Association
Alliance Building Society Staff Association
National & Provincial Staff Association
Woolwich Independent Staff Association

Other Organisations (7)
Building Societies Members Association
Bow Group
Centre for Advanced Land Use Studies, College of Estate Management
Co-operative Union Ltd.
Commission for Racial Equality
Equal Opportunity Policy and Law Group
National Federation of Sub-Postmasters

Academics (3)
Mr. M. Ball (Birbeck College)
Mr. P. Hesketh (UMIST)
Dr. A. Schofield (School of Management and Organisation Science)

Other Individuals (15)
J. Alletson
Ms. K. Bishop
E. C. Burrell
P. T. Duddy
J. W. Findler
A. F. E. Gilham
C. J. How
G. N. Hunter
T. A. W. Lloyd
Richard Ottaway, MP
Dr. M. J. Russell
A. Samuels
A. W. Shouler
C. M. Taylor
D. M. Thom

Oil (Gross Domestic Product Earnings)

Mr. Wilson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will incorporate the gross domestic product earnings from oil produced in the Scottish sector of the North sea as determined under the 1968 Continental Shelf Jurisdiction Order, into Scottish gross domestic product figures given in official publications.

Mr. Peter Rees: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Wilson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the figure for the financial year 1983-84 for the gross domestic product of the United Kingdom continental shelf region; and if he will give the estimated figure for the year 1984-85.

Mr. Peter Rees: Estimated gross domestic product of the continental shelf in 1983 was £15·7 billion. Forecasts for any future years are not available.

Trustee Savings Banks

Mr. Nellist asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations, and from what sources, he has received in favour of the transfer of the trustee savings banks to private sector status.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The plans for the transfer of the trustee savings banks to fully-fledged private sector status have been drawn up on the basis of proposals made by the TSB Central Board in consultation with the Treasury. In addition to my discussions with the TSB Central Board and representatives of the individual TSBs, I have received a small number of letters from hon. Members and members of the public asking about particular aspects of the proposals.

Fontainebleau Agreement

Mr. Marlow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer to set out the detailed conditions necessary to satisfy the financial mechanisms required by the Government arising from the Fontainebleau agreement.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *90*]: The Fontainebleau arrangements are still under discussion within the Community, but the Government will lay the relevant documents before the House when these negotiations are completed.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agricultural Development and Advisory Service

Sir Peter Mills asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the future of the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service.

Mr. Jopling: When Professor Ronald Bell joined my Ministry as the new director general of the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service, I asked him to give particular attention during his first six months to developing his views on the future shape and direction of ADAS. I asked him in particular to consider whether present ADAS priorities needed to be revised; whether some services could satisfactorily be provided by the private sector; and whether and how far there is scope for transferring to the user the cost of the services provided.

Professor Bell has consulted widely with interested organisations and individuals in the industry as well as in the Ministry and his report, which is published today, provides a clear view of the way in which the service should develop over the next decade.

He concluded that ADAS was an effective and dedicated service held in high esteem by the industry to which it had rendered valuable service, but that certain changes of approach and style of operation are now needed. In particular he recommended:

(i) a refocusing of the ADAS effort at present devoted to Research and Development so as particularly to concentrate on the Development end of the spectrum;
(ii) a commitment to the use of computer-based information technology as the method by which a great deal of information and advice is provided to the industry in the late 1980s;
(iii) consideration should be given to the possibilities of charging users for part or all of any service (including work under statutory schemes) where there is an identifiable benefit to the customer;
(iv) greater emphasis should be given to conservation and animal welfare work.

I endorse Professor Bell's view of the value of the work ADAS has done and I believe he has correctly identified the direction in which ADAS should move in the future. I therefore intend to proceed to a detailed examination of what would be involved in the implementation of his recommendations. The report raises a number of substantial questions which will need careful consideration. In particular, I endorse the conclusion that in principle it seems entirely appropriate that farmers and others in the industry who avail themselves of these services should contribute to their cost, and I believe that, if Parliament approved the necessary legislation in time, it would be reasonable to envisage roughly 20 per cent. of the total cost of ADAS being met in this way by 1987-88. But the necessity for primary legislation to give effect to this emphasises the need for further work before detailed and final decisions can be taken. Adequate time will be allowed for this and for the necessary consultations with the many interests concerned.

I am having this further work put in hand immediately and will welcome the views of the interests concerned so that these can be taken into account in the final decisions on the implementation of this report. I have arranged for copies of the report to be deposited in the Library of the House, and copies will also be available from the Vote Office.

Butter Stocks

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from retail traders concerning EEC proposals to dispose of surplus stocks of butter in the United Kingdom; what discussions he has had on this subject with the European Commission, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: The retail trade and others involved in supplying butter have made it clear that they regard special sales of Community butter stocks as highly disruptive. They also consider that such sales over the Christmas period do little to increase consumption, which in any case tends to be higher at that time. I pressed the Agriculture Commissioner to consider promoting the sale of butter by means of a more general subsidy payable over a longer period. He was not prepared to do this. However, the Commission's regulation does include the flexibility needed to permit the special sale to take place in the new year, when it may be more effective in increasing sales of butter.

Sir Hector Monro asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the detailed arrangements for implementing the European Community special sale of butter stocks.

Mr. Jopling: The Butter (EEC Special Sale) Regulations laid today provide for the implementation of this scheme in the United Kingdom. They provide for a maximum price of 42p per 250g pack, for the labelling of packs with the inscription "Special Sale—EEC" and for the advertising of the butter when it is on sale starting from 14 January 1985. The regulations also provide for the necessary enforcement arrangements and penalties. A total of 39,200 tonnes of UK produced butter from Community butter stocks will be made available to consumers under these arrangements.

Poultry Industry

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assess the effect on the competitiveness of the British poultry industry of the poultrymeat hygiene regulations; and what information he has about the enforcement of such regulations in other member states of the EEC.

Mrs. Fenner: I am aware that in certain member states the EC poultrymeat hygiene legislation is less effectively enforced than in this country. The Government have taken steps to reduce the resulting distortion of competition and are continuing to seek an equitable permanent solution.

Sole (Total Allowable Catches)

Mr. Maclean asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the Commission's recent proposals to increase the total allowable catches for 1984 for sole in the English channel have yet been adopted.

Mr. MacGregor: I am glad to report that the Commission's proposals to increase the TACs for sole in the English Channel have now been formally adopted by the Council. At our request the figure for western Channel (VIIe) sole was increased by a further 50 tonnes beyond that proposed by the Commission. The UK quotas for western and eastern (VIId) Channel sole will therefore both be increased by 80 tonnes. These increases should on present informtion mean that there will be no closure of these fisheries in 1984.

ENERGY

Coal Mining Dispute (Secondary Picketing)

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he or his officials have had with nationalised energy industries regarding the seeking of injunctions by the industries against secondary picketing of its installations in the current miners' dispute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My right hon. Friend has been in close touch with the Chairman of the nationalised energy industries in connection with matters arising from the miners' dispute.

The Government have made clear that they would not wish to discourage any employers from using the legal remedies which are available to them as a result of employment legislation. Action under these provisions, however, must be a judgment for individual managements.

Coal Imports

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) how much coal, and from which countries, has been imported into the United Kingdom since the beginning of the mining dispute to the latest date for which figures are available;

(2) if any coal has been imported from Vietnam since the beginning of the miners' strike;

(3) how much coal has been imported from Poland since March to the latest date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Information about the volumes of coal which have been imported into the United Kingdom is provided in the "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom" which is available in the Library of the House.

Sizewell Inquiry

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will provide a breakdown of the total cost of the public inquiry appertaining to Sizewell B power station to date; and how these costs have been or are to be met;

(2) what percentage of the total cost of the public inquiry appertaining to Sizewell B power station is accounted for by objectors' costs.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on Thursday 25 October at column *431* to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing).

WALES

Motorways

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of kilometres of motorway *(a)* in use, *(b)* under construction and *(c)* planned but not under construction on 1 November for the years 1983 and 1984.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The information is as follows:

Number of kilometres of motorways in Wales	*1 November 1983*	*1 November 1984*
In Use	120	120
Under Construction	NIL	NIL
Planned but not under construction	10	10

Holyhead

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list all financial aid given over the last five years to the area of Holyhead, stating the projects for which it was granted;

(2) if he will list all urban aid and other applications to his Department for financial assistance for the area of Holyhead for the last five years stating which have been granted.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Secure Psychiatric Unit

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Wales what progress is being made in establishing a regional secure psychiatric unit in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Office issued a consultation paper in June this year entitled "Proposals for Consultation on the provision of Medium Secure Therapeutic Units in Wales: Policy Appraisal". This reassessed the demand for psychiatric facilities for those who need care in conditions of greater security than is usually provided at local psychiatric hospitals but less than that provided at the special hospitals. It also considered how the estimated demand might best be met over the next 10 years. The paper, a copy of which is in the Library, concluded that in addition to the existing secure provision at North Wales hospital, Denbigh, which has been funded by the Welsh Office, there should be across Wales three or four additional units each of 15 to 20 beds.

We are considering carefully the comments which have recently been received on the document, and when my right hon. Friend has taken decisions a further appraisal will be conducted to determine the most appropriate siting. There will then be further public consultation on the proposals.

Approval has also been given to an 11-bed expansion of Garth Angharad hospital, near Dolgellau. This will be centrally funded and run as a regional service. It offers a valuable facility for young people whose special psychiatric needs cannot be catered for at local hospitals.

A483 (Improvements)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much money has been spent on improvements to the A483 in Wales since 1974; how much is earmarked for this purpose for each of the next three years; and how many miles have been improved since 1974.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: A number of small improvement schemes have been undertaken on the A483 in Wales but details of the length improved since 1 April 1974 are not readily available. In this period more than £9 million cash has been spent on improvements and preparation work for future schemes. forecast expenditure on major schemes in the next three years is estimated at:

	£ million
1985-86	4·3
1986-87	19·9
1987-88	20·8

Labour Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many unemployed *(a)* 16-year-olds, *(b)* 17-year-olds and *(c)* 18-year-olds are registered in Wales;

(2) how many people in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Mid-Glamorgan and *(c)* Clwyd have been jobless for 12 months, for 24 months, for 36 months, and for 48 months, respectively.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: This information is available in the House of Commons library.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many registered disabled people are jobless in Wales; and how many have been jobless for more than 12 months.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Information on the number of registered disabled people who are unemployed is available only for those who choose to register for employment at jobcentres and careers offices. In September 1984 there were 2,566 registered disabled and 4,851 unregistered disabled job seekers unemployed. Detailed information in respect of the length of time these registrants have been unemployed is not available.

Special Employment Programmes

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales are engaged in special employment programmes.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The number of people covered by the special employment and training measures in Wales at the end of September 1984 is estimated as follows:

	Numbers
Community Industry	960
Community Programme	8,790
Enterprise Allowance Scheme	2,470
Job Release Scheme	3,420
Job Splitting Scheme	140
Young Workers Scheme	4,630
Youth Training Scheme	21,370
	41,780

Redundancies

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many redundancies have been announced in Wales in each year from 1979-80 to 1983-84; and how many have been declared since April 1984.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I am informed by the Manpower Services Commission that the number of notified redundancies in Wales in the years concerned was as follows:

	Number
1979	11,663
1980	45,215
1981	36,432
1982	24,647
1983	16,041
*1984	8,666

* Up to September.

Between April 1984 and September 1984 the figure was 5,635.

Job Creation

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of *(a)* the number of service industry jobs created in Wales since 1979 and *(b)* the number of manufacturing jobs created in Wales since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Comprehensive information is not available for either the service industries or the manufacturing sector. However, since 1 May 1979 projects for which offers of selective financial assistance were accepted, or which were allocated Government-financed factories, promised to provide over 67,000 jobs.

Manufacturing Industry (Job Losses)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many manufacturing jobs have been lost in Wales since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Information on net changes in employment levels based on estimates of the number of employees in employment compiled by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment indicates that between June 1979 and June 1984 there was a decrease of 100,000 in the number of employees in employment in the manufacturing sector in Wales.

Derelict Land Reclamation

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total level of expenditure by his Department on derelict land reclamation in Wales for each of the years from 1979-80 to 1983-84; and what is the estimated level of expenditure for 1984-85 and 1985-86.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The Welsh Development Agency took over responsibility for derelict land reclamation from the Welsh Office in 1976. Total expenditure since 1979 on derelict land schemes funded by the WDA and on residual Welsh Office projects approved before 1976 was as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	7·8
1980-81	9·1
1981-82	10·9
1982-83	10·2
1983-84	11·7

In the current year over £9 million is expected to be spent on WDA and Welsh Office schemes. No decisions have yet been taken on the likely expenditure provision for this activity in 1985-86. It is also anticipated that expenditure associated with land reclamation will be aided under the urban development grant programme.

British Rail

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed by British Rail in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The latest date for which information is currently available is 1981 when the number employed was of the order of 11,600.

National Health Service (Manpower)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed by the National Health Service in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The annual census of National Health Service employees is carried out each September. At 30 September 1983, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 63,704 staff employed with a whole-time equivalent of 54,131.

Aerospace Industry

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed by the aerospace industry in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Current information relates to September 1981 when 6,512 people were employed in the aerospace industry in Wales.

Newbridge—Chester (Link Road)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the cost of linking by dual carriageway the A5 at Newbridge to the Chester southerly bypass; what is the length of this projected roadway; and what is the estimated cost, and start and completion dates of each of the proposed sections of the road.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The information is as follows:

Scheme	*Length miles (km)*	**Ready to start date*	*Estimated contract period*	*Estimated cost (land and works) £ million*
A483 Gresford-Pulford By-pass (Welsh element)	6·3 (10·1)	Summer 1986	2½years	17·6
A483 Ruabon By-pass and Wynnstay Link	3·8 (6·1)	Autumn 1985	2 years	17·5
A483 Newbridge By-pass and Whitehurst Link	3·8 (6·1)	Autumn 1986	2 years	14·4
				49·5

* Date by which engineering design and statutory procedures are expected to be complete. The actual start of construction will depend on the availability of resources.

Chester–Bangor (Dual Carriageway)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his revised estimate of the cost of providing a dual carriageway road between Chester and Bangor; and if he will express this as an estimated cost per mile and indicate the estimated date of completion.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The provisional programme envisages the substantial completion of the upgrading of the A55 in Wales by the end of the decade subject to the satisfactory completion of engineering design and the statutory procedures and to the availability of resources. The estimated cost of planned schemes and those in progress is about £430 million—an average cost of about £12 million a mile.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much money has so far been expended on the projected Chester–Bangor A55 dual carriageway; and if he will list the length and cost of each completed section.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Excluding expenditure on planned schemes and those in progress, the information is as follows:

	Date completed	*Length miles (kms)*	*Cost (£m cash)*
Abergele bypass	1968	3·6 (5·8)	1·988
Aber to Tair Meibion	1969	1·5 (2·3)	0·211
East of St. Asaph to Waen Gate (St. Asaph bypass)	1969	2·6 (4·2)	1·753
Chester southerly bypass (Welsh section)	1976	1·1 (1·8)	2·367
Northop Hall Crossroads to East of Gables	1976	0·8 (1·2)	0·209
East of Northop Crossroads to East of Gables	1976	0·6 (1·0)	0·116
Coed-y-Cra to Chaingates	1976	0·2 (0·3)	0·433
Holywell bypass (Stage 1) Casino junction	1980	1·4 (2·3)	3·173
Diversion east of Abergele	1981	2·6 (4·2)	7·323
Hawarden bypass	1984	8·0 (12·9)	27·123

A55 (Colwyn Bay Section)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the Colwyn Bay section of the A55 dual carriageway scheme to be opened; what is its length; and what is his estimate of its cost and its opening date.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The Llanddulas to Rhos-on-Sea interchange section of the A55 is expected to be opened on 7 December and the remaining length to Glan Conwy in the spring of 1985; the total length of both sections is 6·8 miles and the total cost is currently estimated to be £126 million.

Housing Associations

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much money was granted to the housing associations of Wales in 1983-84; what is the estimated provision in 1984-85; and what is the change in real terms in the amount of money allocated to the housing associations in Wales for 1984-85 as compared with the level of expenditure in 1979-80.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Capital allocations to housing associations in Wales through the Housing Corporation were £41 million and £39 million for 1983-84 and 1984-85, respectively. The allocation for 1984-85 is some 3 per cent. higher in real terms than that for 1979-80.

Milk Processing Plants

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many milk processing plants exist in Wales; how many people are currently employed in them; and what is his provisional estimate as to *(a)* which plants may close or suffer partial closure and *(b)* how many jobs will be lost following the implementation of the Dairy Milk Quota Regulations 1984.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: It is estimated that there are some 40 plants involved in the preparation of milk and milk products in Wales employing around 3,000 full-time employees.

It is a matter for the companies concerned to determine in their commercial judgment the future capacity that will be required.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Irrigation Projects

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will outline the current extent of United Kingdom overseas aid in respect of irrigation projects in the Third world ; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: The latest available information relates to expenditure in 1983 and is as follows:

	Bilateral Programme	£
Bangladesh	Pumps for deep tubewells	172
Guyana	Tapakuma irrigation	757,378
Honduras	Drilling rig for agricultural water	83,842
Indonesia	Madura groundwater	158,722
Indonesia	Kediri irrigation	551
Indonesia	Krueng Jreve and Baro irrigation	36,654
Kenya	Bura irrigation	558,520
Malawi	Hara irrigation headworks	1,044
Mauritius	Northern Plains	12,554
Mauritius	Northern Plains consultancy	64,454
Pakistan	Salinity control (SCARP VI)*	1,856,325
Sri Lanka	5 Tanks irrigation	175,982
Thailand	Groundwater project	92,500
		3,798,698
	Commonwealth Development Corporation	
Mauritius	Irrigation authority projects	150,000
Swaziland	Swaziland irrigation scheme	1,257,000
		1,407,000
	Overall total	£5,205,698

* Salinity Control and Reclamation Project.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Guatemala

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government have had recently or intend to have discussions with the Government of Guatemala.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. and learned Friend met the Guatemalan Minister for Foreign Affairs in San Jose in September during the meeting between European and Central and Latin American Foreign Ministers. The possibility of resuming consular relations broken off by Guatemala in 1981 was discussed. There will be further talks at official level in due course.

EC (Own Resources)

Mr. Rogers asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had in the Council of Ministers regarding an increase in own resources.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The question of an increase in own resources was discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council on 2 and 3 October. Member states agreed to meet the Community's inescapable financial obligations, including our abatement in respect of 1984, on the revenue side as agreed at Fontainebleau. All but one member state agreed that this should be done by bringing forward a limited amount of new own resources into 1985. The question will be discussed again at the next Foreign Affairs Council.

Middle East

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to the middle east.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I visited Lebanon and Israel between 28 and 30 October. In Lebanon I was able to reaffirm to President Gemayel our support for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from his country. In Israel, I had friendly and open discussions with Israeli Ministers, primarily on the problems of Lebanon and on the Arab-Israel dispute. I also had a most useful meeting with Palestinian representatives.

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what circumstances Her Majesty's Government will fund the armed forces of the Crown to serve in the middle east in territory invaded by and occupied by Israel; and if such criteria apply to Lebanese, Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian territory.

Mr. Luce: The 10 members of the European Community have said that they are prepared to participate in international guarantees for a peace settlement of the Arab-Israel dispute. The multinational force and observers in Sinai includes a small British headquarters contingent. There are no current plans to station further British contingents in the region.

Western European Union

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made at recent ministerial meetings of the Western European Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Murphy) on 12 November.

Michelle and Victoria Wolstenholme

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has had about the abduction of Michelle and Victoria Wolstenholme; what action is being taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Inquiries by the children's mother's solicitors were answered on 15 and 20 August 1984. The only other representations have been the right hon. Gentleman's letters to my right hon. and learned Friend of 24 October and 4 November, to which my right hon. and learned Friend has replied. This correspondence has been copied to Her Majesty's embassy in Madrid and Her Majesty's consulate in Malaga with instructions to bring to the notice of the competent authorities the existence of an English court order declaring the children wards of court and to seek their assistance in tracing the children.

Falkland Islands

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Falkland Islanders are employed by his Department in the Falkland

Islands and in what capacity; and how rates of pay compare with the equivalent grade of British personnel with whom they are working.

Mr. Renton: None. Those Falkland Islander who work for the Civil Commissioner as domestic staff are employees of the Falkland Islands Government.

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why prescription charges are not made for drugs supplied in the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Renton: I am consulting the Falkland Islands Government and will write to the hon. Member.

Cyprus

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the efforts being made by Her Majesty's Government to ensure that the United Nations resolution on the future of Cyprus is carried out.

Mr. Renton: Recent United Nations Security Council resolutions on Cyprus (for example SCR 541 and SCR 550 of November 1983 and May 1984 respectively) have requested the United Nations Secretary-General to pursue his mission of good offices in order to achieve progress towards a settlement in Cyprus. We have been active with all the parties concerned in support of the Secretary-General's present initiative and stand ready to assist him further.

Ethiopia

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of hon. Members who have visited Ethiopia during the past three years, and to whom official facilities have been extended by Her Majesty's Government or the Ethiopian Government; and if he will give a breakdown in the *Official Report* of the total costs involved, and by whom those costs were borne.

Mr. Rifkind: I shall write to the hon. Member.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Mercury Communications

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, in the light of the withdrawal of two principal backers, he contemplates further assistance to Mercury Communications.

Mr. Butcher: The granting of a licence on 5 November by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under section 7 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 indicates the Government's commitment to the success of Mercury Communications. the fact that Mercury is about to become a wholly owned subsidiary of Cable and Wireless is entirely a commercial matter. Those concerned have made clear their belief that the new arrangements will work to the advantage of Mercury as it expands its operations, and there is no call for any Government involvement in this matter.

British Telecom

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he proposes to take to increase competition in the area of communications technology arising from the monopoly of British Telecom.

Mr. Pattie: The Government's commitment to the development of competition in telecommunications and the policies designed to secure that objective were set out in the statements made by my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) on 17 November 1983 and 20 July 1984. I have nothing to add to those statements.

Textile Industry

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement outlining the proposals he has made to the European Commission in respect of Northern Ireland under the non-quota programme for the development of new economic activities in areas affected by the restructuring of the textile industry; and what considerations the Government took account of in formulating these proposals.

Mr. Trippier: The European Commission is currently considering the United Kingdom's proposed programmes under the non-quota section of the European regional development fund.

I understand that decisions are expected shortly. Announcements concerning the measures to be introduced in the qualifying areas of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, will be made as soon as the Commission's decision is known.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the money allocated to Northern Ireland under the non-quota programme for the development of new economic activities in areas affected by the restructuring of the textile industry will be designated for each of the 26 district council areas in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Trippier: The whole of Northern Ireland is eligible under the ERDF non-quota regulations for textile areas, and no specific allocation on the basis of district council areas is proposed.

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which schemes submitted under the European regional development fund non-quota textile measures submitted by *(a)* Lancashire county council, *(b)* Burnley borough council and *(c)* North East Lancashire Development Association are likely to receive approval.

Mr. Trippier: No applications for aid have yet been invited, since the European commission is still considering the United Kingdom's proposed non-quota programmes, including that of textile areas. My right hon. Friend will make an announcement as soon as the Commission's approval, which I understand is expected shortly, is made known.

Inventions

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government are taking to permit private firms to tender for the right to exploit commercially public sector inventions.

Mr. Butcher: With the ending of the British Technology Group's right of first refusal to the exploitation of public sector inventions, which was announced by the Prime Minister on September 12 last year, it will be open to private sector firms to seek more business of this kind.

Alvey Programme

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) in respect of how many United States controlled companies applications to participate in the Alvey programme are pending; and to which projects these applications relate;

(2) how many United States controlled companies now participate in the Alvey programme and in respect of which projects.

Mr. Pattie: Two US controlled companies are included in the various consortia who have applied for support from the Alvey programme, and the relevant applications are in the areas of man machine interface and intelligent knowledge based systems. No formal offers have yet been made in respect of these applications but this now depends only on the finalisation of the contractual details, including the collaboration agreement between the partners.

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether it is the policy of Her Majesty's Government that the ownership of patents and other intellectual property rights arising from the Alvey programme should reside in the participants.

Mr. Pattie: The intellectual property rights arising from an Alvey project will be vested in the non-academic participants as set out in their collaboration agreement which will also contain the terms for recompensing the academic participants for their contribution.

Mr. Batiste asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the participation of United States controlled companies in the Alvey programme.

Mr. Pattie: Companies eligible for support under the Alvey programme are those established in the United Kingdom, with relevant expertise to contribute, who are ready to collaborate and to exploit the technology arising from the programme to the benefit of the United Kingdom.

Holiday Property Bonds (BBC Programme)

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will obtain a transcript of the BBC Radio 4 "Money Box" programme broadcast on Saturday 27 October to investigate the legitimacy of the holiday property bond scheme to ensure that all existing and respective bond holders have adequate legal protection.

Mr. Fletcher: I have obtained the transcript of "The Money Box" programme concerning this scheme, which is being studied to determine whether any aspects fall within my Department's jurisdiction and if so whether any action is necessary.

The holiday property bond scheme is operated from the Isle of Man by companies incorporated there, but is marketed in this country by a United Kingdom company, Villa Owners Club Limited. My Department has no jurisdiction over Isle of Man companies but I am considering the position regarding the marketing of the bond in this country.

Guarantees

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will introduce legislation to provide that claims made under guarantees for goods supplied are settled within a specified period of time;

(2) if he will introduce legislation to provide that guarantees which accompany goods contain enough information for the customers to know who has given the guarantee and whether an insurance scheme is involved.

Mr. Fletcher: I have no plans at present to introduce legislation on guarantees. The Director General of Fair Trading published in August a discussion paper "Consumer Guarantees" which put forward for comment by 31 December 1984 some preliminary recommendations, including those mentioned in these questions. I understand the Director General will be examining responses to that paper with a view to publishing a final report in the new year.

Franchise Businesses

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what details he has of the number of franchise businesses which have been set up in Yorkshire and Humberside in the last three years; and if these businesses can be broken down by type of franchise.

Mr. Trippier: This information is not available in my Department.

Fair Competition (British Telecom)

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints of alleged prevention of fair competition by British Telecom have been reported to the Office of Telecommunications.

Mr. Butcher: This is a matter for the Director General of Telecommunications and I have drawn my hon. Friend's question to his attention.

Selling by Telephone

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have to introduce new guidelines on selling by telephone.

Mr. Fletcher: As proposed in his report on "Selling by Telephone", which was published on 4 October, the Director General of Fair Trading is to encourage the adoption of new guidelines by all firms responsible for initiating or making unsolicited telephone approaches to consumers. This is the most appropriate course.

Pirate Radio Stations

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of Trade and Industry if he will list in the *Official Report* all pirate radio stations known to his Department to be currently operating within England and Wales.

Mr. Butcher: I am aware of the following inland stations currently transmitting in the broadcasting bands:

Andromeda Radio
Greek Voice of London
London Greek Radio

Radio Jackie
Radio Shoestring
Skyline Radio
Solar Radio
South East Sound
Storeton Community Radio
Sunshine Radio
Voice of the Immigrant

My Department is aware of other stations which have been operating recently but have been subject to action by the radio investigation service and are not currently broadcasting.

Coal Imports

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list, by volume, the coal imports to the United Kingdom for each month since January 1984 from Poland, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, West Germany, France, Belgium, Australia and South Africa.

Mr. Fletcher: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Radio Investigation Service

Mr. Onslow asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he intends to increase the staff of the radio investigation service.

Mr. Butcher [*pursuant to his reply* 12 November 1984, c. *86*]: My right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) informed the House on 13 April of the Government's intention to review the functions of the radio investigation service to determine what resources it needs. That review is still in progress and I cannot anticipate its conclusions.

TRANSPORT

M40 (Oxford-Birmingham)

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether, when the inspector's report on the inquiry into the M40 Oxford-Birmingham motorway is submitted to him, he will place the duty of evaluating and preparing submissions to him on the report and decision in the hands of a separate part of his Department which has had no connection with the promotion of that scheme or with its justification and defence at the public inquiry.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment received the independent inspector's report in May. A decision should be announced around the end of the year. It has been established in case law that making use of the technical and factual expertise of officials who have an intimate knowledge of the proposals and the objections to them is a correct part of the decision-making process.

Public Service Vehicle Test

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what was the percentage failure rate in England for the annual public service vehicle test; and how this compares with the immediate two preceding years;

(2) how many vehicles in England failed the annual public service vehicle test in the last year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Chalker: Statutory annual testing of public service vehicles was not introduced until 1982. The results of informal yearly inspections carried out before then are not available.

Details of annual tests in England for the two complete years 1982-83 and 1983-84 and for the current year from April to September are as follows:

	1982-83	*1983-84*	*†1984-85*
Number of tests	53,485	52,785	24,534
Number failed*	12,782	10,853	4,190
Percentage failed*	23·90	20·56	17·07

* These results exclude vehicles which had defects which were rectified during the course of the test.
† 6 months.

Motorways

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Transport, for the years 1982, 1983 and 1984, what are the number of kilometres of *(a)* trunk motorways, *(b)* other trunk roads, *(c)* local authority motorways, *(d)* other principal roads and *(e)* other roads.

Mrs. Chalker: The information is as follows:

Road Lengths (kilometres) as at 1 April: Great Britain

	1982	*1983*	*1984*
(a) Trunk Motorways*	2,254	2,606	2,692
(b) Other Trunk Roads	12,319	12,322	12,416
(c) Local Authority Motorways*	98	103	100
(d) Other Principal Roads	34,510	34,587	34,746
(d) Other Roads	293,811	295,361	297,422

* Excluding slip-roads.

Notes: 1984 data are provisional and the 1982 figures incorporate revisions to previously published material.

The data for 1982 differ from those published in "Transport Statistics Great Britain 1972-82" because they incorporate revisions made after publication.

The data for 1984 are provisional.

Local Authority motorways dropped from 103 kilometres in 1983 to 100 kilometres in 1984 because of, inter alia, the trunking of 3·8 kilometres of the Eccles bypass in Greater Manchester.

Motorway Repairs

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the *Official Report* all projected motorway repairs currently being undertaken and those likely to be so in the next six months.

Mrs. Chalker: The information requested is as follows. In addition, other works may be necessary—for example, where emergency repairs are needed to the safety barrier. Such works cannot be predicted in advance, but they tend to be of short duration.

County	Location	Nature of works
Current works		
Avon	M4 junctions 20-21	Repairs to Severn bridge
Bedfordshire	M1 junctions 11-12	Improvement to service area access
Cheshire	M6 junctions 17-18	Resurfacing (work almost complete)
Gloucestershire	M5 junctions 13-14	Overlay
Greater Manchester	M62 junctions 15-17	Bridge repairs
Hereford and Worcester	M5 junctions 4-5	Advance works for road widening
Hereford and Worcester	M50 junctions 2-3	Reconstruction and resurfacing
Hertfordshire	M25 junctions 23-24	Concrete repairs and lighting
Kent	M2 junction 3	Reconstruction and overlay
Kent	M2 junctions 4-5	Reconstruction and overlay
Kent	M20 junctions 3-4	Repairs to concrete carriageway
Oxfordshire	M40 junctions 5-6	Repairs to concrete carriageway
Staffordshire	M6 junctions 10A-11	Reconstruction and overlay
Surrey	M3 junction 1	Embankment and bridge works
Surrey	M25 junctions 10-11	Contractors' remedial works
Warwickshire	M6 junctions 3-4	Bridge and safety barrier works
Works in the next six months		
Avon	M4 junctions 20-21	Severn bridge repairs
Berkshire	M4 junctions 12-13	Advance works for major maintenance in 1985
Buckinghamshire	M1 junctions 13-14	Advance works for major maintenance in 1985
Cheshire	M6 junctions 20-21	Advance works for major maintenance in 1985
Cheshire	M56 junctions 12-14	Resurfacing
Cheshire	M56 junctions 8-9	Overlay
Cheshire	M62 junction 10	Advance works for major maintenance in 1985
Gloucestershire	M5 junctions 9-10	Carriageway patching
Hereford and Worcester	M50 junctions 2-3	Advance works for major maintenance in 1985
London borough of Hounslow	M4 junctions 1-2	Viaduct painting
Northamptonshire	M1 junctions 14-15	Central reserve and safety barrier works
Northamptonshire	M1 junctions 16-18	Advance works for major maintenance in 1985
Staffordshire	M6 junctions 11-12	Advance works for major maintenance in 1985
Surrey	M25/M23 interchange	Bridge repairs
West Midlands	M5 junctions 2-3	Advance works for major maintenance in 1985
West Midlands	M6 junctions 5-6	Viaduct repairs
South Yorkshire	A1(M) Blyth roundabout	Advance works for major maintenance in 1985
West Yorkshire	M621 Leeds M1 spur	Reconstruction and overlay

Goods Vehicle Operator Licensing

Mr. Norris asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has now considered the scrutiny carried out of goods vehicle operator licensing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: I have today placed copies of the scrutiny, incorporating my response, in the Libraries of both Houses.

Driving Test Organisation

Mr. Ward asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has now considered the scrutiny carried out of the driving test organisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: I have today placed copies of the scrutiny, incorporating my response, in the Libraries of both Houses.

Steeple Langford Bypass

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce his decision on the preferred route of the Steeple Langford bypass near Salisbury.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I am endeavouring to reconcile the views expressed as a result of the public consultation with the relative economics and environmental effects of the alternative schemes.

I regret that at present I am unable to forecast when an announcement will be made, but I am conscious of the need to do this as soon as possible.

Driving Licences (Recognition)

Mr. Alan Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to extend the recognition of driving licences to further countries outside the European Community.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Road Traffic (Driving Licences) Act 1983 gives the Secretary of State power to designate countries and territories where he is satisfied with the provisions for granting licences to drive. Their licences would then be exchangeable for British ordinary licences. The power does not extend to vocational licences.

As required by the Act, representative organisations are being invited to give their views on a second list of designations, which would come into effect on 2 February 1985. The countries concerned are Barbados, the British Virgin Islands, the Republic of Cyprus, Finland, Malta and Zimbabwe.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authorities (Finance)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total amount held in *(a)* special funds and *(b)* rate fund balances by each of the 18 authorities designated under the Rates Act 1984, at the end of 1982-83 and 1983-84 according to his Department's figures.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: From outturn forms returned by local authorities the information is as follows:

£ million

	Balances at end 1982-83		Balances at end 1983-84	
	Special Funds	Rate Fund	Special Funds	Rate Fund
Basildon	0·49	1·75	0·21	3·55
Brent	13·90	0·16	16·06	0·10
Camden	0·68	12·85	*	*
GLC	18·88	200·20	46·80	*
Greenwich	12·63	1·11	*	*
Hackney	10·39	0·91	*	*
Haringey	34·91	0	34·83	0
ILEA	†	18·67	†	*
Islington	5·04	0·03	0·55	17·18
Lambeth	1·29	12·98	*	17·01
Leicester	11·57	3·38	15·06	0·54
Lewisham	7·78	0·23	*	*
Merseyside	31·99	0	39·89	0
Portsmouth	2·14	2·58	*	*
Sheffield	21·65	3·80	*	*
South Yorkshire	10·11	3·59	10·13	0
Southwark	4·52	0·93	2·94	4·10
Thamesdown	1·89	0·72	2·21	1·16

* Relevant outturn form has not yet been received from local authority.

† ILEA special funds are included within GLC total.

Acid Rain

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what response the Government are making to the current concern regarding acid rain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government's views on the problem of acid deposition will be set out in our response to the fourth report of the House of Commons Environment Committee, Session 1983-84, to be published very shortly.

Borough of Brent (Expenditure)

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he received from the chief executive and other officers of the London borough of Brent *(a)* before and *(b)* after 24 October concerning the council's intentions about tailoring expenditure to live within the Government's limits.

Mr. Waldegrave: The chief executive of the London borough of Brent wrote to my Department on 31 July asking for information before advising the members of his council whether or not to see a redetermination of Brent's expenditure level. My Department has received no other correspondence from officers of the council about rate limitation.

Local Authorities (Manpower Returns)

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will arrange to have emergency planning staff excluded from local authority manpower returns.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend has no proposals for changing the coverage of the Joint Manpower Watch survey.

Beaches (Pollution)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to require local authorities to publicise the pollution figures for the beaches in their areas.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend will recall that the Royal Commission on environmental pollution's 10th report refers to bathing water and, in particular, to the suggestion from the Association of County Councils that the identification and monitoring of bathing waters should be the responsibility of district councils.

The Government expect soon to reply to the report, and it would not be correct for me to anticipate this reply.

Red Squirrels

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the reintroduction of red squirrels to Regent's park; and whether there are any plans to emulate the London zoo red squirrel watch scheme in royal parks.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department welcomes and has fully co-operated with the red squirrel watch scheme in Regent's park. We should await the outcome of the scheme before considering any extension.

Inner City Partnership Funds

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements exist for the monitoring and auditing of the application of inner city partnership funds.

Sir George Young: Urban programme expenditure is local authority expenditure supported by central Government grant. Responsibility for monitoring and auditing lies in the first place with the local authority concerned. Grant claims made by the local authority must be checked within my Department and are then certified by the local authority's independent auditor. My Department in turn has its own internal audit procedures and is subject to scrutiny by the National Audit Office.

In addition, my officials regularly analyse inner area programmes to compare outturn with approved expenditure. At project level, as well as monitoring visits to a sample of projects the Department commissions studies of the effectiveness of projects in particular fields.

Local Government Reform

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what discussions he has had on methods of controlling the expenditure and manpower of joint boards taking on the responsibilities of the passenger transport authorities of the metropolitan county councils in the event of the implementation of Cmnd. 9063; and what were his conclusions;

(2) what discussions he has had on methods of controlling the expenditure and manpower of joint boards taking on the responsibilities of the fire departments of the metropolitan county councils in the event of the implementation of Cmnd. 9063; and what were his conclusions;

(3) what discussions he has had on methods of controlling the expenditure and manpower of joint boards taking on the responsibilities of the police authorities of

the metropolitan county councils in the event of the implementation of Cmnd. 9063; and what were his conclusions.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I have considered the representations made on this point on response to Cmnd. 9063. My conclusions will be incorporated in the Bill to be published shortly.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the monetary value of services to be transferred directly to London borough control in the event of the dissolution of the Greater London council.

Mr. Waldegrave: Of the GLC's 1984-85 budgeted rate fund net current expenditure, it is estimated that about £380 million-£400 million relates to services which are to be transferred to London boroughs direct. Another £127 million will fall to the borough-controlled London Fire Board.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in detail how the information about concert hall bookings on the South Bank requested in his letter to the director general to the Greater London council of 7 November will facilitate the formulation and, in the event of their being approved by Parliament, the implementation of proposals for the abolution of the Greater London council.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government intend to propose that, if Parliament agrees, responsibility for the South Bank arts complex will be transferred to the Arts Council. The information requested will facilitate a continuing concert programme on the South Bank after 1 April 1986.

Minerals Planning

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of Stae for the Environment if he will list the metropolitan district councils which will not be required to undertake minerals planning in the event of the implementation of Cmnd. 9063.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Planning application for minerals will need to be considered by those authorities to which they are submitted. More generally, the wider aspects of minerals planning will need to be considered by metropolitan districts in preparing their unitary development plans.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many minerals planning applications have been determined since 1974 by each of the metropolitan county councils, listed by district council area.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I understand that between April 1974 and March 1984 decisions were taken on 440 minerals planning applications within the areas of metropolitan county councils. I regret that more detailed information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Rates (Railways)

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to amend the General Rating Act 1967 to provide the same exemption for privately run non-profit making railways as applies to rail services in the public sector.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. We included provisions in the Rates Act 1984 which will enable us to bring the British Railways Board, London Regional Transport and British Waterways Board into rating by means of statutory formulae. Meanwhile, these boards continue to make payments in lieu of rates, as required by section 32 of the General Rate Act 1967.

Falkland Islands

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many Falkland islanders are employed by his Department in the Falkland Islands; in what capacity; and how rates of pay compare with the equivalent grade of British personnel with whom they are working.

Sir George Young: None.

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if there are administrative instructions that prevent any Falkland islander from being employed in projects such as the installation at Mount Pleasant airport; what is the total work force on that project; how many are islanders; what rates of pay are current; and if islanders are paid at the same rate as non-islanders.

Sir George Young: There are no instructions preventing the employment of Falkland islanders on PSA work at Mount Pleasant or elsewhere. However, the Falkland Islands Government have made it clear that the local labour force is so limited that any significant recruitment by PSA contractors could cripple Government services. PSA has therefore instructed its contractors to consult with the Falkland Islands Government before recruiting local workers. At present the Laing-Mowlem-Amey Roadstone Construction joint venture is employing one Falkland islander on the Mount Pleasant airfield project. There are currently 1,724 other contractors' employees engaged on the project. In accordance with UK Government policy, these workers have been recruited in the United Kingdom. Rates of pay are a matter between the contractor and his employees. The rates reflect the particular duties involved and, in the case of the United Kingdom employees, the discomforts and inconvenience of working 8,000 miles from home.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if it is his intention in the forthcoming rate support grant settlement to pay regard to those shire counties which are experiencing difficulties with regard to the provision of books and similar equipment in schools.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend will consider all the representations he has received about the 1985-86 rate support grant settlement before taking final decisions.

EMPLOYMENT

South Yorkshire

40. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of persons unemployed in the county of South Yorkshire; and how many of these are young people who have never experienced normal employment.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 11 October the number of unemployed claimants in South Yorkshire was 96,269. In the area covered by the South Yorkshire jobcentres there were 7,393 unemployed school leavers under 18 years of age.

Wages Council Workers (Knowsley)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to ensure that all those workers in Knowsley covered by wages councils are aware of their legal entitlements.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A copy of the appropriate wages order is sent to all employers known to employ workers covered by wages councils. Employers are required by law to display the wages order where it can be seen by their workers. These arrangements have applied since the inception of wages council legislation and are considered adequate.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* firms and *(b)* workers in the area of the metropolitan borough of Knowsley are covered by wage councils.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Statistics for the number of establishments covered by wages councils are not collected for areas smaller than Wages Inspectorate divisions. National estimates only are made for the number of workers covered by wages councils.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many wage council establishments in Knowsley were found to be underpaying in the last year; how many workers were involved; and what was the amount of arrears paid and the number of prosecutions.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Statistics are not collected for geographical areas smaller than Wages Inspectorate divisions. In 1983, 865 establishments inspected in the north west (west) division of the Wages Inspectorate were found to have underpaid 1,945 workers. Arrears totalling £138,860 were paid. No employers in Knowsley were prosecuted last year for offences under the Wages Councils Act 1979.

Vital Skills Agency

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Employment if Her Majesty's Government will seek to establish a vital skills agency.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government welcome proposals for the better co-ordination of the efforts of existing bodies in this field, but believe that action should be initiated by industry itself. Further consideration is being given to the proposal to establish a vital skills agency in the context of the current review of future manpower needs in the information technology field.

Training Information Framework

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the training information framework.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The training information framework is a system which is being developed by the Manpower Services Commission to hold detailed information on employment and training provision at local level.

A pilot scheme will operate at nine locations starting in late 1985. When this has been fully evaluated, we will consider the costs and benefits of extending the system.

Community Programme (Adult Training)

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what steps the Government are taking to introduce an adult training element into the community programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: In his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder) on 30 July, at column 122, my right hon. Friend announced the Government's decision that, as part of the adult training strategy, participation in the community programme should be linked with short courses of work preparation and basic skills training. The Manpower Services Commission has begun to set up such courses and we expect some 50,000 community programme clients a year to benefit when the arrangements are fully developed.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Employment what steps the Government are taking to increase the number of jobs in manufacturing industry in the north-west region.

Mr. Alan Clark: The White Paper "Regional Industrial Development" (Cmnd. 9111) published last December made it clear that the Government are committed to maintaining an effective regional policy and to ensuring that it is economic and effective in creating genuine jobs. An announcement on the current regional policy review will be made shortly.

Sustainable employment ultimately depends however on a healthy economy and competitive industry. Our policies are directed to this end and we continue to look for ways of building on what has been achieved so far. One important effect on firms' competitiveness is the level of wages and the Government believe that moderating the growth in real earnings will have a significant impact on employment levels in manufacturing and other industries in the north-west, and elsewhere.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Employment what were the numbers employed in manufacturing industry in Britain in 1970, 1976, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Alan Clark: The following table gives the numbers of employees in employment in manufacturing industries in Great Britain in June of each of the years specified. The June 1970 figures are based on the 1968 Standard Industrial Classification and those for the later years are based on the 1980 SIC. Figures based on the 1980 SIC are not available for dates prior to June 1971.

June	*Number*
1970	8,164,000
1976	7,131,000
1979	7,113,000
1980	6,804,000
1981	6,100,000
1982	5,803,000
1983	5,539,000

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently in youth training schemes operating in Lambeth.

Mr. Peter Morrison: There were 926 young people in training on youth training schemes in the borough of Lambeth at the end of October.

Merseyside

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of people covered by Her Majesty's Government's special employment and training measures in the county of Merseyside.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Currently, some 28,400, although because of the various bases on which local information is collated an unknown proportion, will be in areas outside the county of Merseyside.

Leeds (Unemployment Statistics)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many people under the age of *(a)* 18 years and *(b)* aged 19 to 21 years in the Leeds travel-to-work area were unemployed on the latest available figures;

(2) how many people in the Leeds travel-to-work area under the age of 18 years have been unemployed between *(a)* six months and 12 months and *(b)* for more than 12 months on the latest available figures;

(3) how many people unemployed in the Leeds travel-to-work area have been unemployed for *(a)* between six months and 12 months, *(b)* between 12 months and 24 months and *(c)* more than 24 months on the latest available figures.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information for the new travel-to-work areas on the age of claimants unemployed and their duration of unemployment will become available next year. Data for the old Leeds travel-to-work area in respect of unemployed claimants aged 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 to 24 years are available in the House of Commons Library.

Job-splitting Scheme

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many applications have been approved since the start of the job-splitting scheme; how many are in respect of males and females; what public funds have been spent on advertising the scheme and otherwise promoting it; and how many employer inquiries have been received.

Mr. Alan Clark: Nine hundred and sixty-nine applications involving 428 men and 1,510 women in part-time job opportunities had been approved under the scheme at the end of September, 1984. The total cost of publicising the scheme including leaflets, posters and press advertising has been £423,208. No specific records are kept of day-to-day inquiries, but advertising campaigns in January to March 1983 and March 1984 generated over 11,000 requests for further information about the scheme, mainly from employers.

Glasgow Redundancy Payments Office

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement regarding the future of the Glasgow redundancy payments office, indicating what proportion of the work on redundancy, insolvency and maternity payments done in Scotland is undertaken by the Glasgow office, the number of inquiries made at the public counter in 1983 and what efforts have been made to obtain more suitable alternative accommodation in Glasgow.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department is planning to close the Glasgow redundancy payments officer by the end of March 1985. The decision was taken following a review of the staffing needs and effective organisation of redundancy payments work. Increased efficiency together with a steady decline in work volumes means that Scotland can now be served by a single office in one location. With the lease on the Glasgow office due to expire at the end of March 1985, the decision was made to centralise all Scotland's redundancy payments work on the Edinburgh redundancy payments office, primarily because the same building also houses essential support services and the Department's senior line management responsible for redundancy work.

In the year ended 30 September 1984, the Glasgow office handled 59 per cent. of Scotland's redundancy work, 69 per cent. of insolvency work and 47 per cent. of maternity work. It also dealt with some 3,050 personal callers. Although Glasgow deals with more personal inquiries than Edinburgh, the overwhelming majority of RPO work is conducted by post or telephone.

London Borough of Brent

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what proportion of all employees in the London borough of Brent is employed in an establishment whose final owner is registered overseas, according to the latest information available to him; and if he will supply comparative information for each of the years 1954, 1960 and 1970 or the nearest available to each of these dates;

(2) what information he has as to the proportion of all employees in the London borough of Brent employed in an establishment whose final owner undertakes more than 20 per cent. of his total manufacturing production overseas; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing comparisons for each of the years 1954, 1960 and 1970.

Mr. Alan Clark: I regret that information of this nature is not collected by the Department.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were employed in the London borough of Brent in each standard industrial classification according to the latest annual census of employment; if he will break down the figures by full-time and part-time and male and female; and what are the comparative figures for the same geographical area for 1954, 1960 and 1970, or the nearest available date.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information is as follows. The figures relate to the area covered by the Kilburn, Wembley and Willesden jobcentre areas which corresponds closely to the London borough of Brent.

Employees in employment (Thousands)

Standard Industrial Classification 1968	September 1981 Males* Full-time	Males* Part-time	Females Full-time	Females Part-time	All	June 1971 Males Full-time	Males Part-time	Females Full-time	Females Part-time	All
All industries and services*†	62·6	2·9	26·7	12·1	104·4	80·5	2·9	30·7	13·3	127·4
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Mining and quarrying	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Food, drink and tobacco	5·1	‡	1·4	0·6	7·1	8·2	‡	2·4	0·9	11·5
Coal and petroleum products	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Chemicals and allied industries	1·7	‡	0·8	0·1	2·6	1·2	‡	0·7	0·2	2·1
Metal manufacture	0·5	‡	0·1	‡	0·6	1·3	‡	0·2	‡	1·6
Mechanical engineering	3·9	‡	0·7	0·1	4·8	6·2	‡	1·1	0·3	7·6
Instrument engineering	0·6	‡	0·2	‡	0·9	0·9	‡	0·4	0·1	1·4
Electrical engineering	5·2	‡	2·3	0·4	7·9	9·1	‡	3·6	0·9	13·7
Shipbuilding and marine engineering	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Vehicles	0·9	‡	0·2	‡	1·2	3·0	‡	0·4	0·1	3·5
Metal goods not elsewhere specified	2·7	‡	0·6	0·1	3·4	5·2	0·1	1·4	0·3	6·9
Textiles	0·1	‡	0·1	‡	0·2	0·1	‡	0·1	‡	0·2
Leather, leather goods and fur	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	0·1	‡	0·2	‡	0·3
Clothing and footwear	0·4	‡	0·6	0·1	1·1	0·3	‡	0·7	‡	1·0
Bricks, pottery, glass, cement, etc.	0·2	‡	‡	‡	0·3	0·7	‡	0·2	‡	1·0
Timber, furniture, etc.	0·9	‡	0·1	‡	1·1	1·3	‡	0·2	‡	1·6
Paper, printing and publishing	1·9	0·1	0·4	0·1	2·5	2·9	‡	1·2	0·2	4·4
Other manufacturing industries	0·7	‡	0·3	0·1	1·1	1·4	‡	0·8	0·1	2·4
Construction	4·0	0·1	0·6	0·2	4·8	4·8	‡	0·3	0·1	5·3
Gas, electricity and water	1·0	‡	0·6	0·2	1·8	1·1	‡	0·2	‡	1·3
Transport and communication	6·6	‡	1·1	0·2	7·9	9·6	0·1	1·4	0·1	11·1
Distributive trades	9·9	0·6	4·4	2·3	17·2	8·4	0·7	4·3	3·1	16·5
Insurance, banking, finance and business services	3·3	0·3	2·2	1·2	6·9	2·3	0·1	1·9	1·2	5·6
Professional and scientific services	3·0	0·4	4·6	3·5	11·6	3·3	0·8	5·4	3·4	12·9
Miscellaneous services*	6·8	1·0	3·3	2·5	13·6	5·7	0·8	2·7	1·8	11·0
Public administration and defence†	3·2	0·1	2·0	0·4	5·6	3·3	0·1	1·0	0·2	4·6
Unclassified by industry	0·1	‡	‡	‡	0·1	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡

*Excludes private domestic service.
†Excludes HM Forces.
‡Nil or negligible.
Source: Census of employment. Results of the 1981 census were compiled on the basis of the Standard Industrial Classification Revised 1980 (SIC 80) and subsequently converted to SIC 1968 for comparability. Figures are not available on a consistent basis prior to 1971.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were employed in the London borough of Brent in establishments of the following sizes, according to the latest annual census of employment: *(a)* establishments of 20 or fewer employees, *(b)* establishments of 21 to 100 employees, *(c)* establishments of 101 to 500 employees, *(d)* establishments of 501 to 1,000 employees, *(e)* establishments of 1,001 to 10,000 employees and *(f)* establishments of 10,001 or more employees; how many establishments fell into each of these size ranges; and if he will supply comparative information for each of the years 1954, 1960 and 1970, or the nearest available to each of these dates.

Mr. Alan Clark: I regret that size analyses from the census of employment are not available for areas smaller than regions.

Area Manpower Boards

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to increase minority representation on area manpower boards.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *100*]: No, but a review of area manpower boards is due to take place before the end of next year and this will cover issues relating to the composition of boards.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Deaf and Partially Hearing Children

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many (i) deaf and (ii) partially hearing children have been educated in *(a)* ordinary schools and units and *(b)* special schools in each education authority area in each of the last five years; and which authorities make no use of special schools for such pupils.

Mr. Dunn: The number of deaf children and those with partial hearing in special schools and ordinary schools in each local education authority in January 1983 is shown in the following table. Corresponding figures for the four previous years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Local education authority	*Special schools		Maintained Primary and Secondary schools	
	Number of pupils who are deaf	Number of pupils who have partial hearing	†Number of pupils who are deaf	†Number of pupils who have partial hearing
Barking	—	1	27	10
Barnet	4	—	3	26
Bexley	—	—	7	27
Brent	—	—	2	24
Bromley	—	—	21	25
Croydon	—	5	12	19
Ealing	—	2	1	46
Enfield	—	4	2	2
Haringey	37	27	—	19
Harrow	—	—	2	48
Havering	—	1	2	45
Hillingdon	—	—	3	54
Hounslow	53	20	1	1
Kingston-upon-Thames	—	—	1	30
Merton	—	—	—	—
Newham	59	6	—	19
Redbridge	—	—	—	24
Richmond-upon-Thames	—	—	—	3
Sutton	—	1	1	20
Waltham Forest	75	7	5	70
ILEA	196	51	9	442
Birmingham	213	22	9	138
Coventry	—	2	9	64
Dudley	1	1	8	44
Sandwell	1	1	4	36
Solihull	—	—	11	77
Walsall	—	—	16	47
Wolverhampton	1	1	21	49
Knowsley	—	—	1	36
Liverpool	85	22	3	80
St. Helens	1	7	16	14
Sefton	110	63	3	17
Wirral	—	1	2	82
Bolton	28	81	1	28
Bury	—	—	2	56
Manchester	70	81	3	79
Oldham	—	25	2	13
Rochdale	—	3	—	46
Salford	—	2	3	37
Stockport	162	—	6	51
Tameside	—	—	—	48
Trafford	—	1	—	21
Wigan	—	—	—	—
Barnsley	—	—	10	51
Doncaster	151	1	3	42
Rotherham	—	—	6	47
Sheffield	—	1	34	121
Bradford	116	14	10	71
Calderdale	—	—	6	32
Kirklees	—	—	—	42
Leeds	115	113	12	78
Wakefield	—	—	9	39
Gateshead	—	—	8	16
Newcastle upon Tyne	99	4	14	36
North Tyneside	—	1	11	25
South Tyneside	—	1	8	27
Sunderland	—	—	2	67
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—	—
Avon	53	29	9	215
Bedfordshire	—	—	39	93
Berkshire	130	71	46	163
Buckinghamshire	38	3	24	118
Cambridgeshire	—	14	39	118
Cheshire	1	—	13	224
Cleveland	48	23	17	104
Cornwall	3	—	23	120
Cumbria	3	7	19	63
Derbyshire	127	31	9	113
Devon	83	81	10	115
Dorset	—	1	25	22
Durham	—	—	1	84
East Sussex	1	115	24	55
Essex	2	18	20	239
Gloucestershire	1	3	16	60

Local education authority	*Special schools		Maintained Primary and Secondary schools	
	Number of pupils who are deaf	Number of pupils who have partial hearing	†Number of pupils who are deaf	†Number of pupils who have partial hearing
Hampshire	57	13	57	162
Hereford and Worcestershire	1	3	26	77
Hertfordshire	67	88	11	157
Humberside	22	—	40	132
Isle of Wight	—	—	5	46
Kent	153	8	12	290
Lancashire	75	28	3	153
Leicestershire	—	4	32	123
Lincolnshire	—	—	7	89
Norfolk	35	2	24	72
North Yorkshire	—	1	16	90
Northamptonshire	—	2	27	103
Northumberland	—	1	12	44
Nottinghamshire	35	25	57	326
Oxfordshire	2	1	7	118
Shropshire	—	—	20	57
Somerset	—	—	23	82
Staffordshire	57	57	13	108
Suffolk	—	—	4	77
Surrey	143	9	4	110
Warwickshire	1	—	4	46
West Sussex	5	—	18	39
Wiltshire	3	1	8	84
England	2,723	1,212	1,116	7,202

The pupils included above are classified by their major handicap.
* Including non-maintained special schools, and deaf and partially hearing pupils in special schools for other handicaps.
† Including some part-time pupils.

Teacher Training

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to reach conclusions about the recommendations in the report of the Advisory Committee on the Supply and Education of Teachers on teacher training and special education needs.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales are considering the recommendations of the report and will announce their decisions in due course.

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science which organisations have been sent copies of the consultative document issued by his Department in October about the recent report on teacher training and special education needs.

Mr. Dunn: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the consultative document "Special School Provision for Hearing Impaired Children" which my right hon. Friend issued in October. Views on the document have been invited from the following organisations:

Regional Conferences on Special Education
LEAs maintaining special schools for the hearing impaired
Non-maintained special schools for the hearing impaired
Independent schools for the hearing impaired
Association of County Councils
Associations of Metropolitan Authorities
Assistant Masters' and Mistresses' Association
National Association of Head Teachers
National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers
National Union of Teachers
Professional Association of Teachers
Secondary Heads' Association
British Association of Teachers of the Deaf
British Deaf Association
National Deaf Children's Society
Royal National Institute for the Deaf
Voluntary Council for Handicapped Children
SENSE
Society of Education Officers
Nutfield Priory Parents' Association
All-Party Disablement Group

Voluntary Organisations (Grants)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what grants have been made and, if applicable, under which schemes, to national voluntary youth organisations over each of the last 10 years; and what provisions have been made for grants to these and similar organisations for 1985.

Mr. Brooke: Grants made by this Department since the financial year 1975-76 towards the headquarters expenditure of national voluntary youth organisations are as follows. Until April 1983 these grants were made under regulation 29 of the Further Education Regulations 1975, and since April 1983 under regulation 20(1) (6) of the Education (Grant) Regulations 1983. Grants for 1985-86 will be announced next year.

Organisation	1975-76	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Anglican Young People's Association	360	430	475	550	500	500	550	600	500	—
Army Cadet Force Association	3,600	4,320	4,320	4,900	5,000	5,950	6,400	6,900	7,100	7,600
Association for Jewish Youth	6,880	8,255	8,255	9,750	10,350	12,000	13,100	15,100	15,850	17,150
Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland	3,180	3,815	3,815	4,300	4,700	5,700	7,200	7,950	7,950	18,200
Boys' Brigade	11,365	13,640	16,368	18,500	19,350	23,000	24,000	27,000	25,800	30,600
British Council of Churches	1,960	2,350	2,820	3,350	4,300	5,100	5,550	6,050	7,350	8,650

Organisation	1975-76	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
British Red Cross Society	4,205	5,045	5,045	5,700	6,100	7,350	7,800	8,350	7,900	8,200
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,500	1,800	16,300	18,650
Campaigners	850	1,020	1,224	1,350	2,750	3,850	4,300	4,650	4,650	5,300
Catholic Youth Service Council	5,000	6,000	6,000	7,100	9,600	12,550	13,950	15,250	15,200	15,300
Church Lads' Brigade and Church Girls' Brigade	4,445	5,335	5,335	6,050	6,850	7,950	8,600	9,300	9,750	10,150
Church of England Board of Education	16,535	19,840	19,840	22,400	20,700	22,950	25,050	27,250	28,550	34,150
Colony Holidays	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,000	1,537	—
Concordia	850	1,020	1,122	1,250	—	—	—	—	—	—
Concourse	—	—	—	—	—	1,000	—	—	—	—
Co-operative Union	1,110	1,330	1,330	1,500	1,550	1,800	1,750	1,850	1,850	1,700
Council for Environmental Conservation	—	—	—	—	—	10,300	11,250	12,200	12,800	19,300
Council for Environmental Education	—	—	—	3,350	—	—	—	—	—	—
Council for Nature	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,000	1,050	1,100
Covenanters	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,000	1,550	5,250
Da wasul Islam; United Kingdom and Eire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,000	2,100
Discovery Dockland Trust	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dockland Settlements	920	1,105	1,105	1,200	—	—	—	—	15,000	19,500
Drake Fellowship	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	58,500	70,550
Duke of Edinburgh's Award	23,665	28,400	34,680	40,200	41,850	49,750	53,350	58,050	17,950	21,450
Endeavour Training	—	4,000	10,000	11,800	12,200	14,150	15,050	16,350	1,150	1,250
Forest Schools Camps	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,000	1,100	6,750	6,650
Foudroyant Trust	5,230	6,275	6,275	6,900	6,500	6,900	7,000	7,500	1,150	3,600
Frontier Youth Trust	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,000	1,100	—	1,000
Gingerbread Holidays	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	53,350	44,400
Girl Guides Association	23,600	28,320	33,984	40,100	43,000	52,000	54,900	59,400	19,350	20,100
Girls' Brigade	11,680	14,015	14,015	15,850	16,600	19,250	18,500	20,000	—	—
Girls' Friendly Society	6,305	7,565	7,565	8,550	—	—	—	—	21,300	22,150
Girls' Venture Corps	11,510	13,810	13,810	15,600	15,700	18,200	19,850	21,350	900	1,100
Horse Rangers Association	—	—	—	—	—	—	750	850	8,950	14,900
Inter-Action Trust	—	—	—	—	—	—	3,000	3,600	1,000	1,050
International Voluntary Service	10,650	12,780	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,000
Invalid Children's Aid Association	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4,600	5,000
Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade	—	—	—	2,500	2,850	3,450	3,850	4,200	2,300	3,600
JMB Development Training	—	—	—	—	—	1,500	1,650	1,850	59,450	74,800
Methodist Association of Youth Clubs	18,025	21,630	25,956	30,650	37,800	46,450	50,700	56,200	35,271	—
National Association for Asian Youth	—	—	—	—	13,250	23,750	39,600	43,250	149,000	159,600
National Association of Boys' Clubs	81,230	97,475	97,475	110,150	107,350	127,600	139,350	151,600	5,700	11,850
National Association of Muslim Youth	—	—	—	—	—	—	5,000	5,450	236,000	265,100
National Association of Youth Clubs	99,085	118,900	118,900	148,650	165,300	201,430	220,000	239,350	15,450	19,300
National Elfrida Rathbone Society	5,230	6,275	6,900	14,900	10,200	11,100	12,100	13,450	11,750	30,550
National Federation of 18+ Groups	4,170	5,005	5,500	6,500	7,950	9,600	9,700	10,700	20,200	31,500
National Federation of Gateway Clubs	—	1,000	4,000	4,750	6,600	9,300	11,250	14,450	60,950	69,750
National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs	17,725	21,270	21,270	26,000	29,100	35,200	39,150	48,850	23,400	36,500
National PHAB	—	2,500	8,000	9,450	10,350	12,500	16,400	18,750	7,800	8,100
National Youth Assembly	—	—	—	1,400	4,500	6,050	6,750	7,450	4,000	4,150
National Youth Orchestra	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	30,650	34,450
National Youth Theatre	9,145	10,975	10,975	12,400	15,300	20,050	27,300	29,250	8,250	10,300
Ocean Youth Club	1,680	2,015	2,418	2,850	4,500	5,650	6,050	6,600	11,550	13,200
Outward Bound Trust	6,550	7,860	9,432	10,650	10,150	11,250	11,400	12,200	9,950	10,850
Quaker Home Service	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,000	1,100	—	3,500
Reform Synagogues of Great Britain	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,300	2,400
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,000	2,200	4,200	4,350
Sail Training Association	1,640	1,970	2,364	2,650	3,000	3,500	3,750	4,100	8,300	9,050
Salvation Army	1,640	1,970	2,364	2,800	6,000	6,950	7,400	8,050	1,150	1,200
Save the Children	—	—	—	—	—	1,000	1,100	1,200	53,300	47,100
Scout Association	25,375	30,450	36,540	43,100	46,850	54,300	58,200	54,300	13,400	13,400
Sea Cadet Association	7,615	9,140	10,968	12,050	12,350	13,700	13,200	14,150	8,050	8,800
St. John Ambulance	4,205	5,045	4,023	4,550	5,900	7,700	7,400	8,050	—	—
Task Force	4,910	5,890	—	—	—	—	—	—	3,600	3,750
Union of Maccabi Association	—	—	—	2,000	2,250	2,700	3,150	3,450	4,200	4,150
United Kingdom Federation of Jazz Bands	—	—	—	4,000	3,700	4,300	4,350	4,650	19,100	29,800
United Reformed Church	5,615	6,740	8,088	9,550	11,700	13,900	15,200	16,650	5,400	5,900
Woodcraft Folk	—	1,000	2,000	2,250	4,400	5,100	5,100	5,400	22,000	25,150
Young Christian Workers	8,335	10,000	10,000	11,800	13,150	16,550	19,250	21,000	118,700	134,550
Young Men's Christian Association	49,150	58,980	54,491	64,300	71,200	86,800	95,650	104,250	62,700	65,200
Young Women's Christian Association	29,660	35,590	35,590	44,500	46,750	54,150	57,500	62,200	30,250	34,000
Youth Hostels Association	12,290	14,750	17,700	20,900	21,900	25,800	28,700	31,250		

Medical Research Council

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what matters concerning the financial position of the Medical Research Council were discussed at his recent meeting with the chairman of the council; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations he has received from the Medical Research Council about the adequacy of current financial provision for the council; what response he is making; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: At the meeting in July, the chairman of the Medical Research Council explained the council's difficulties, the measures it had taken to remain within its cash limit, and their implications. My right hon. Friend took note but was unable to respond at the time to the chairman's request for additional funds, as the 1984 public expenditure survey was still in progress.

My right hon. Friend announced yesterday that the science budget in 1985-86 will be £587 million. This represents an increase of £14 million over previously announced planning figures. He awaits the advice of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils on the distribution of the money between the bodies funded by the science budget, of which the Medical Research Council is one.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Nationality

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will conduct an inquiry into the working of the British Nationality Act and the immigration rules.

Mr. Waddington: The working of the British Nationality Act 1981 and the immigration rules is kept under constant review. We see no need for an inquiry.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Colvin asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest number of arrests resulting from incidents arising out of the miners' dispute; and in what categories charges have been made.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Between 13 March and 8 November inclusive 7,658 arrests have been made in connection with the miners' dispute. Up to and including 6 November charges had been brought for the following offences:

Offence	*Number*
Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1936	3,264
Obstruction of the police	1,525
Obstruction of the highway	582
Criminal damage	724
Criminal damage with intent to endanger life	4
Arson	10
Assault on the police	263
Assault—actual bodily harm	293
Assault—grievious bodily harm	34
Theft	137
Resisting arrest	17
Possession of an offensive weapon	38
Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act—Besetting	226
Burglary	17
Handling stolen property	1
Drug offence	1
Breach of the peace	117
Breach of bail conditions	28
Attempt (various offences)	17
Drunkenness	56
Unlawful assembly	507
Railway offences	17
Affray	21
Riot	137
Incitement	1
Reckless driving	14
Threats/conspiracy to cause damage	12
Explosives offence	3
Threats to kill	3
Unlawful imprisonment	2
Other offences	123
Total charges	8,194

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total financial cost to Lancashire county council for police operations in connection with the miners' strike; and how much assistance he has given to cover the cost of those operations.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand that the Lancashire police authority had incurred additional expenditure of £1·114 million on policing the miners' dispute in the county up to 30 September. This expenditure qualifies for normal police grant at 50 per cent. and the authority has sought and received an advance of grant of £543,000 from the Department. The Lancashire police have also incurred costs in providing assistance to other forces but these costs will be reclaimed by the Lancashire police authority from the authorities for those forces.

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many criminal charges against those who are alleged to have intimidated working miners have been entered since the inception of the coal industry dispute; and, of the total, how many cases have been tried;

(2) of the 7,914 charges made since the commencement of the coal industry dispute, how many have been tried to date; and, of those involving in some way alleged intimidating working miners, how many cases have actually been heard.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Between 13 March and 6 November, 6,356 people were charged with a total of 8,194 offences in connection with the miners' dispute. Two thousand eight hundred and ninety-eight of these cases had been completed by 6 November. The figures available centrally do not distinguish between offences committed against working miners and those committed against others. Nor is it possible from these figures to determine which of the charges have been brought for incidents of intimidation. That information could be obtained only at disproportionate expense.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which category of the wanted and missing persons' index of the police national computer names of miners not suspected of any crime but involved in picketing have been placed.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I am making inquiries to establish whether the position has changed since August when the hon. Member was informed that there had been no such cases.

Prison Department and Treasury (Manpower Reviews)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the reports of the joint manpower reviews carried out by the Prison Department and the Treasury and produced in August 1982 and June 1983, or alternatively place copies in the Library.

Mr. Mellor: The reports produced as a result of the work of the joint manpower review are internal management documents which have assisted the Government in assessing the manpower requirements of the prison service in the course of recent annual public expenditure surveys. We have no plans to publish the reports.

Women in Custody

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women currently on remand in custody awaiting trial or sentence have their children with them; and what are the offences with which they have been charged.

Mr. Mellor: None.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women gave birth while on remand in custody awaiting trial or sentence in 1983 and so far in 1984; what was the offence with which each one was charged; and what was the sentence.

Mr. Mellor: Fourteen unsentenced women gave birth whilst in custody between 1 January 1983 and 7 November 1984. Of the 13 for whom information about the outcome of court proceedings is available, the following table sets out the main offence for which each was charged and the outcome.

Main Offence	*Outcome of trial*
Arson	Hospital Order
Theft	2½ years' imprisonment
Robbery	3 years' youth custody

Main Offence	Outcome of trial
Drugs	18 months' youth custody
Handling of stolen goods	12 months' youth custody
Burglary	Probation
Drugs	Acquitted
Drugs	555 days' imprisonment
Drugs	18 months' imprisonment
Deception	Hospital Order
Manslaughter	Acquitted
Soliciting	Fine
Murder	Life imprisonment

Prisoners (Medical Records)

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will outline the facilities available for the transfer of medical records from the community to prison medical staff in the case of prisoners *(a)* held on remand and *(b)* held awaiting final placement.

Mr. Mellor: There are arrangements for the NHS records of prisoners sentenced to more than two years' imprisonment to be sent to the prison concerned as soon as possible. In addition, every prisoner is examined by a medical officer when first received, and if it appears that he was under treatment before he entered custody the medical officer may if he thinks it necessary write to the doctor or hospital concerned to obtain further information.

Fire Brigades (Asbestos)

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he will encourage the fire brigades of local authorities to carry asbestos detectors on all occasions;

(2) whether he will issue guidance to fire brigades encouraging them to undertake comprehensive reviews of their procedures regarding asbestos contamination with respect to notifying the relevant local authority when asbestos contamination occurs following a fire.

Mr. Giles Shaw: It is for fire authorities to acquire appropriate equipment and liaison arrangements are best determined locally in the light of particular circumstances; but the Department has issued guidance to fire authorities on the dangers from asbestos and how to minimise them. This guidance is kept under review and, as my right hon. and learned Friend has already announced, our officials will be discussing with all the relevant interests how it could best be supplemented following the hazards that arose from a recent fire in Cricklewood.

Immigrants (Bail)

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of those released on bail pending the hearing of an appeal under the Immigration Act 1971 during 1983 then absconded;

(2) how many of those detained as the subject of a deportation order and then granted temporary release during 1983 then absconded.

Mr. Waddington: I regret that this information is not available.

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those treated as illegal entrants and granted temporary admission during 1983 then absconded.

Mr. Waddington: Seventeen absconded after being granted temporary release.

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those granted temporary admission at ports of entry during 1983 then absconded.

Mr. Waddington: Of the 7,292 persons who were given temporary admission to the United Kingdom at ports of entry in 1983, 137 absconded.

Civil Defence Budget

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total civil defence budget for 1984-85 is expected to be; how much of this will be grant-aid to local authorities; and what would be the additional costs of making all local authority emergency planning staff salaries 100 per cent. grant-aided for that year.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The total civil defence budget included in the Supply Estimates for 1984-85 is £69·7 million. Of this, £11·1 million is for civil defence grant to local authorities. In these Estimates, provision for local authority planning staff was approximately £5·8 million. The additional cost of making provision for the salaries of all local authority emergency planning staff (currently grant-aided at 75 per cent.) eligible for grant at the rate of 100 per cent. would be about £1·9 million.

NATO (Civil Defence)

Mr. Neil Thorne asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what subjects the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation civil defence committee is currently considering; and whether it has done any work on the protection of the civil population in a nuclear, biological and chemical environment.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The civil defence committee of NATO is developing guidelines on a wide range of civil defence matters, among them methods for the protection of the civil population against the effects of modern weapons.

Charity Funds

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to introduce legislation to improve administration of charity funds, or to make fund trustees more accountable to the public.

Mr. Mellor: Not at present.

Prevention of Terrorism (Landing Cards)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether any members of the European Parliament travelling from the Republic of Ireland into the United Kingdom on Monday 29 October refused to complete the landing cards issued under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976 on their arrival at Heathrow airport; and if he will make a statement;

(2) by what authority he has sought to excuse Members of the European Assembly from completing landing and embarkation cards issued under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976 *(a)* during their journeys within the United Kingdom between Great

Britain and Northern Ireland and *(b)* between any part of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: I understand that two members of the European Parliament travelling from the Republic of Ireland to Brussels via Heathrow airport on 29 October who had at first been asked to complete landing cards were allowed to proceed without doing so when they satisfied the examining officer by other means of their identities. The use of these cards is discretionary under the Prevention of Terrorism (Supplemental Temporary Provisions) Order 1984, and the decision lies with the examining officer.

BBC (Advertising)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Government will now give consideration to the introduction of advertising to fund the British Broadcasting Corporation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Under the terms of the current television licence fee settlement the fees are to remain at their present levels until the end of next March. Discussions are likely to begin with the BBC shortly about the level of fees after that. I do not envisage that those discussions will include the possibility of funding the BBC by advertising.

Vermin Control (Firearms)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what restrictions he imposes on access to approved ranges for farmers and others who hold firearms certificates for vermin control.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The question of what conditions, if any, should be attached to a firearm certificate is one for the chief officer of police to decide according to the circumstances of each case.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek powers to permit all firearms certificate holders for vermin control the authority periodically to check and when necessary to adjust the zero of their rifles, including those rifles which are considered to have fixed sights.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Chief officers of police already have power to include such provision on firearm certificates. My right hon. and learned Friend is considering what advice on zeroing should be included in the memorandum of guidance.

Channel Islands and Isle of Man

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what administrative responsibilities he has for *(a)* the Channel Islands and *(b)* the Isle of Man.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The islands are internally self-governing dependencies of the Crown. The United Kingdom Government are directly responsible for their external relations and defence. The Crown acts through the Privy Council. My right hon. and learned Friend is the Privy Councillor with primary responsibility for matters relating to the islands. He acts as the channel of communication between the islands and the United Kingdom Government, and submits advice as appropriate, with respect principally to proposals for legislation (which require Royal Assent) and Crown appointments.

Firearms Act 1968 (Working Party)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the police members of his recent working party on the administration of the Firearms Act 1968 hold for personal use *(a)* a current shotgun certificate, firearms certificate or firearms dealers' certificates, respectively and *(b)* have ever held any of the foregoing.

Mr. Giles Shaw: One of the police members of the working party holds a shotgun certificate and two others have done so in the past; one holds a firearms certificate; and none holds or has ever held, a firearms dealers' certificate. All of the police representatives had had police firearms training.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the report of the working party into the administration of the Firearms Act 1968, dated April 1984; and which sections he is considering for incorporation into the revision of the memorandum of guidance to the police on the administration of the 1968 Act.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. and learned Friend has asked chief constables to adapt their procedures so that they conform with the working party's recommendations. All the recommendations will be reflected in the revised memorandum.

Car Radio (Licence Fee)

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received representations from the British Broadcasting Corporation suggesting that there should be introduced a licence fee in respect of car radios; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Yes. While my right hon. and learned Friend is prepared to consider constructive suggestions for changes in the broadcast receiving licence system, he has informed the BBC that he does not think, on balance, that there would be advantage in reintroducing car radio licences.

Local Radio

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received representations from the Independent Broadcasting Authority suggesting that some diversification of the activities of local radio companies be permitted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No such representations have been received, but the Independent Broadcasting Authority announced on 12 November as part of a package of measures to strengthen the financial foundations of independent local radio, that the authority would in future be placing a stronger requirement on ILR companies to take responsibility for their own affairs, particularly as regards diversification of activities.

Senior Citizens (Television Licences)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to introduce concessionary television licences for senior citizens; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Concessionary licences for all pensioners would cause a very substantial reduction in the licence revenue, which would have to be made up by other licence holders. They would also be unfair on others who, though not pensioners, were in similar financial circumstances. We therefore have no plans to introduce concessionary licences for pensioners generally.

Police National Computer

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will describe the data fields of the crime pattern analysis application of the police national computer and which data fields can be used to retrieve data.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The data fields consist of details of the offence, its location and date, modus operandi, any property stolen, descriptions of suspects or vehicles and a free text section for any additional information. Data can be retrieved from all the data fields.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will describe the data fields of the vehicle owners' index of the police national computer and which data fields can be used to retrieve data.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The data fields consist of the vehicle registration mark, date of first registration, descriptive details of the vehicle, date of last change of keeper, name and address of the current keeper and indicators which provide additional information of use to the police. Records may be retrieved at any terminal by the vehicle registration mark. If specially requested, searches may also be conducted using descriptive details or the post code.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will describe the data fields of the stolen and suspect vehicle index of the police national computer and which data fields can be used to retrieve data.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The data fields consist of the vehicle registration mark, descriptive details of the vehicle, the date and nature of the report, for example that the vehicle has been lost, found, and so on, and a code identifying the police station from which the entry originated. Records may be retrieved at any terminal by the vehicle registration mark. If specially requested, searches may also be conducted using descriptive details or information from any of the other data fields.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will describe the data fields of the criminal names index of the police national computer and which data fields can be used to retrieve data.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The data fields consist of the subject's name and any alias, date and place of birth, Criminal Record Office number and other references, descriptive details, any extra information of which a police officer should be aware, the date of the incident which led to the creation of the record, and the date and time of the last amendment to the record. Records may be retrieved by name together with other optional search factors (date of birth, sex, colour and height), or by the Criminal Record Office number.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will describe the data fields of the proposed criminal records index of the police national computer and which data fields can be used to retrieve data.

Mr. Giles Shaw: On present plans, the data fields of this application, which will cover both convictions and impending prosecutions, will consist of the following: all entries will include a Criminal Record Office reference number, local references and indications as to whether fingerprints and photographs are held. Data fields relating to convictions will also contain details of "recordable" offences of which the subject was convicted; the court; date of court appearance; sentence(s), and the number of other offences taken into consideration. Data fields relating to impending prosecutions will also contain details of the court; proposed date of the court appearance, and the date on which the subject was charged. Records will be capable of being retrieved either by name and other descriptive details or by the Criminal Record Office reference number.

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will describe the data fields of the wanted and missing persons' index of the police national computer and which data fields can be used to retrieve data.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The data fields consist of the subject's name and any alias, descriptive details, any extra information of which a police officer should be aware, Criminal Record Office number and other references, the nature of the entry, for example that the subject is wanted for specific offences, sought for desertion from the armed forces, and so on, details of any offence, the relevant powers of arrest, the date of the incident, the date on which it was reported, the date on which it was entered on the file, and the earliest date on which the case will automatically be removed from the file, together with any additional information which may be relevant. Records may be retrieved by using reference numbers, or by name and descriptive details, or by the type of entry or offence.

Firearms Certificates (Rifles)

Mr. Ron Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in his guidance to chief constables relating to firearms certificates, he will include definitions of those rifle sights requiring adjustment for zero and fixed sights; and if he will give a general indication of the type of rifle and its use for which each would be suited.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question from him on 9 November, at column 21.

Breathalyser Machine

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all makes and types of breathalyser in use in the United Kingdom *(a)* now and *(b)* since the inception of breathalyser tests, showing hand-held machines separately.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Since the inception in 1968 of breath testing as a means of detecting alcohol in the body of a

motorist the following road side breath screening devices (hand held) have been, and remain, approved for use by police forces in England and Wales:

Device	*Type*	*First approval*
Alcotest 80	Bag and tube filled with reactive crystals	1968
Alcotest 80A	Bag and tube filled with reactive crystals	1975
Alcolyser	Bag and tube filled with reactive crystals	1979
Alcolmeter	Electronic	1979
Alert	Electronic	1980

The following evidential breath testing instruments have been approved for use by police in England and Wales from 6 May 1983:

The Camic Simulator and Camic Breath Analyser
The Lion Breath Simulator and Lion Intoximeter 3000.

Instruments for use in Scotland and Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. Friends the respective Secretaries of State.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for reports from the chief constables of the 12 police areas currently holding stocks of plastic baton rounds as to the number and nature of training courses run in their areas in the use of plastic baton rounds; and how many officers have received such training since 1 January.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall write to the hon. Member.

SCOTLAND

Nuclear Winter

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland why he has refused a request for scientists from the Scottish Office to attend conferences on nuclear winter theory.

Mr. Ancram: The Department was invited by Glasgow district council, in conjunction with Strathclyde regional council, to participate in a conference the brochure for which gave prominence to the so-called "nuclear winter" and expressed a hope

"that it may be possible to break through the conspiracy of silence".

As the Government have made no secret of known facts about the effects of nuclear weapons, and as the "nuclear winter" is an unproved hypothesis, the invitation was declined because it was apparent that the conference was unlikely to provide objective or dispassionate treatment of the subject matter.

Young Persons (Remand)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls were held on remand in custody in penal establishments in the last year for which figures are available who were (i) acquitted and (ii) given non-custodial sentences; and what was the average length of time that these were on remand in custody.

Mr. Ancram: Of the 147 children who were held on remand in penal establishments in 1983, 47 were committed by the court to a period of residential training, and five were sentenced to detention. Each of these disposals leads to detention in a place and on such conditions as the Secretary of State directs. In all but a very small minority of cases the place directed by the Secretary of State is a list D school.

No information is held centrally which indicates how many of the remaining 95 children held on remand in a penal establishment were acquitted, were given non-custodial disposals by the court, or were referred to a children's hearing for disposal.

The average period spent in custody on remand in a penal establishment was 26 days.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls aged under 17 years were held on remand in penal establishments in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Ancram: Separate figures for young offenders aged 16 are not available. The numbers of children aged under 16 held on remand in penal establishments during 1983 was:

	Numbers
Boys	141
Girls	6

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number, by age, sex and location, of juveniles on remand in custody in penal establishments at the latest date for which figures are available; and what were the offences with which they were charged and the length of time on remand.

Mr. Ancram: On 30 October 1984, 11 boys aged 15 and no girls were held on remand in Scottish penal establishments. The charges on which they were held and the time spent in custody on that date were as follows:

Nature of charges	*Time in custody*
1. Theft by housebreaking	1 day
2. Assault and robbery	6 days
3. Theft by housebreaking	16 days
4. Civic Government Act, Bail Act	29 days
5. Theft, Road Traffic Act offences	37 days
6. Assault to severe injury, attempting to defeat the ends of justice	44 days
7. Civic Government Act, Bail Act	29 days
8. Theft, Road Traffic Act offences	8 days
9. Attempted murder, assault to severe injury	2 days
10. Assault to severe injury	2 days
11. Assault and robbery, theft	24 days

Ten of the boys were held in Longriggend remand institution and the other was held in Edinburgh prison.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the remand of juveniles to adult penal establishments.

Mr. Ancram: For sentencing purposes in Scotland, a distinction is made between young offenders from 16 to 20 years of age inclusive and children under 16 years of age: "juveniles" is not a legal term.

Young offenders who are remanded in custody are initially remanded in all cases to an adult penal establishment. In the great majority of cases, however, they are quickly moved on to an under-21 remand institution. Children who are remanded in custody are normally located in secure accommodation provided by

local authorities, but where a court certifies that a child over 14 years of age is unruly or depraved the child is remanded to a penal establishment.

It is a requirement of the prison rules that remand inmates are, as far as possible, kept apart from convicted inmates; and as far as possible children remanded in a penal establishment are kept apart from other inmates on remand.

Health Services

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the percentage increase in spending in real terms on hospital and community health services since 1979-80.

Mr. John MacKay: Detailed records of expenditure at constant prices are no longer maintained. Gross recurrent expenditure on hospital and community health services has risen from £737 million in 1979-80 to an estimated £1,291 million in 1984-85 and this has enabled services to expand by about 5 per cent.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage change he estimates changes in population structure and advances in medical technology since 1979-80 will have on the level of spending on hospital and community health services.

Mr. John MacKay: Over the period from 1979-80 to 1984-85 the cost of meeting demand from demographic changes and advances in medical technology has been estimated at around 1 per cent. of hospital and community health services expenditure in each year.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the percentage increase in real input volume expenditure in National Health Service spending since 1979-80.

Mr. John MacKay: Detailed records of programme expenditure in volume terms are no long maintained. Gross expenditure on the National Health Service in Scotland has risen from £1,053 million in 1979-80 to an estimated 1,905 million in 1984-85. This has been sufficient to enable services to expand by about 7 per cent. overall.

Nuclear Bunker, Coupar Angus

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the proposed number of personnel to be accommodated in the nuclear bunker being constructed by Tayside regional council at Coupar Angus.

Mr. Ancram: As I explained in my reply to the hon. Member on 23 October 1984, at column 549-50, Tayside regional council does not propose to provide a "nuclear bunker".

The staffing of the proposed emergency centre, on which construction has not begun, is a matter for the regional council.

Higher Education

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information his Department has from the 1981 census on age participation rates by social class for higher education in Scotland.

Mr. John MacKay: The information requested is not available from the 1981 census. However, the following figures from the 1983 Scottish School Leavers Survey show for each social class the percentage of school leavers from session 1981-82 who entered higher education in the following session:

Social Class	*Per cent.*
I	46·2
II	31·8
III Non-manual	20·4
III Manual	10·4
IV	8·1
V	3·3

Source: 1983 Scottish School Levers Survey.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information his Department has on the number and percentage of unemployed in Scotland by social class from the 1981 census.

Mr. John MacKay: The information requested is as follows:

1981 census—Scotland
Economically active usually resident population by social class

Social Class	*Economically Active*	*Out of employment*	
	(a)	*Number (b)*	*Percentage (c)*
I Professional etc. occupations	82,790	1,760	2·1
II Intermediate occupations	452,480	15,710	3·5
III (N) Skilled occupations—non-manual	491,600	24,350	5·0
III (M) Skilled occupations—manual	606,770	68,280	11·3
IV Partly skilled occupations	452,540	55,040	12·2
V Unskilled occupations	185,350	36,080	19·5
Persons inadequately described, persons with no previous job and Armed Forces	129,820	93,940	72·4
Total	2,401,350	295,160	12·3

Notes:
(1) The economically active include persons in employment (that is in a job at any time in the week before the census) and persons out of employment (that is those who in the week before the census were either seeking work, prevented by temporary sickness from seeking work, or waiting to take up a job already accepted.
(2) Social class is based on occupation for those persons in employment and on the last full-time occupation (if any) for persons out of employment.
(3) Figures in columns *(a)* and *(b)* have been grossed-up from a 10 per cent. sample.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information his Department possesses on the number and percentage of unemployed in Dundee by social class from the 1981 census.

Mr. John MacKay: This information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many young people *(a)* under the age of 18 years and *(b)* under the age of 21 years, in Dundee, have never been in full-time employment since leaving school.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I regret the information is not available in the precise form requested. Figures for young people who have not been in employment since leaving school are compiled for the age bands up to 18, 18 and 19 and over and are available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* an analysis by duration of unemployment, by number and by percentage, at the latest available date for Dundee, in respect of the following groups: *(a)* up to six months, *(b)* over six months, up to one year, *(c)* over one year and up to two years, *(d)* over two years and up to three years and *(e)* three years and over; and if he will give comparable figures for Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's letter to him of 22 October. The information requested is available in the House of Commons Library.

Geriatrics and Geriatric Psychiatry

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current number of consultants in geriatrics and geriatric psychiatry in the Tayside health board area; what were the figures in 1980; and how many vacancies currently exist.

Mr. John MacKay: At 30 September 1983 there were six (whole-time equivalent) consultants in geriatric medicine in the Tayside health board area. The comparable figure for 1980 was five. Geriatric psychiatry is not a separate specialty, but some consultants in general psychiatry spend a major part of their time providing psycho-geriatric services. Consultants in general medicine also undertake the care and treatment of geriatric patients. My Department has not been notified of any existing long-term vacancies in geriatrics, general medicine or psychiatry in the Tayside area.

Radiographers and Physiotherapists

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the number of radiographers and physiotherapists employed by the Tayside health board in each of the past three years.

Mr. John MacKay: The information requested is as follows:

Year;*	*Radiographers†*	*Physiotherapists†*
1981	90	75
1982	88	72
1983	92	72

* As at 30 September.
† Whole-time equivalents.

Nurses

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current number of nurses in geriatrics and psychogeriatrics in the Tayside health board area; what were the corresponding figures for 1980; and how many vacancies currently exist.

Mr. John MacKay: At 8 November 1984, 1,513 nursing staff (whole-time equivalent) were employed in geriatric and psycho-geriatric hospitals and wards in the Tayside health board area. The corresponding figure in 1980 was 1,434.

Geriatric and psycho-geriatric patients are nursed also in general beds in general and teaching hospitals and others are cared for in the community but the number of nursing staff involved cannot be identified separately.

There were 17 nursing staff vacancies at 8 November 1984 in geriatrics and psycho-geriatrics.

Roads

Mr. David Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for the years 1982, 1983 and 1984 the number of kilometres of *(a)* trunk motorways, *(b)* other trunk roads, *(c)* local authority motorways, *(d)* other principal roads and *(e)* other roads.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

	1 April 1982 Kms.	*1 April 1983 Kms.*	*1 April 1984 Kms.*
Trunk motorways	212	212	212
Other trunk roads	2,909	2,909	2,915
Local authority motorways	24	24	24
Other principal roads	7,565	7,579	7,607
Other roads	38,986	39,578	39,750

Redundancies

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of notified redundancies in Dundee in *(a)* 1982, *(b)* 1983 and *(c)* 1984 to date.

Mr. Allan Stewart: There are no comprehensive statistics held on redundancies. The following table shows the number of redundancies affecting 10 or more people notified to the Manpower Services Commission in the Dundee jobcentre area during the period 1 January 1982 to 31 October 1984.

	Number of redundancies
1982	2,087
1983	4,347
1984 to 31 October	1,356

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many firms in Dundee notified their closure to the Manpower Services Commission in *(a)* 1982, *(b)* 1983 and *(c)* 1984 to date; and, in each year, what was the number of redundancies incurred by the closures.

Mr. Allan Stewart: There are no comprehensive statistics held on redundancies. The following table shows for the Dundee jobcentre area the number of redundancies as a result of closure, and the number of establishments closed, affecting 10 or more workers, as notified to the Manpower Service Commission between 1 January 1982 and 31 October 1984.

	Number of closures	Number of redundancies
1982	12	699
1983	15	625
1984 (to 31 October)	12	344

Crofter Housing

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to raise the level of loan and grant for crofter housing.

Mr. Younger: I have no such plans at present.

Deer (Firearms) (Scotland) Order 1984

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland which organisations he consulted, in accordance with his statutory obligations, before preparing the Deer (Firearms) (Scotland) Order 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: The following organisations were consulted during the preparation of the order:

British Deer Society
British Field Sports Society
British Association for Shooting and Conservation
British Deer Farmers' Association
Scottish Venison Dealers' Association
National Game Dealers' Association
Forestry Commission
Scottish Woodland Owners' Association
Institute of Chartered Foresters
Timber Growers United Kingdom
Economic Forestry Group
Fountain Forestry Limited
National Farmers' Union of Scotland
Tilhill Forestry Advisory Service
Society in Scotland for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Institute of Terrestrial Ecology
Hill Farming Research Organisation
Rowett Research Institute
Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland)
Association of Scottish Police Superintendents
Scottish Police Federation
Scottish Landowners' Federation
Crofters Commission
The Guns Review

The consultation documents were also sent to the Gun Trade Association, which approached my Department after a draft of the order was laid before Parliament.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Scotland why he did not consult the Gun Trade Association in connection with the preparation of the Deer (Firearms) (Scotland) Order 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: The Gun Trade Association was mistakenly omitted from the original consultation, but after it had approached the Department was sent copies of the consultation documents and invited to discuss any points of difficulty. The association will be included among those initially approached in any future consultation on this subject.

Improvement Repair Grant

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider the proposal that local authorities should be enabled to restrict improvement repair grant work to a list of approved value added tax registered contractors who are able to offer a recognised guarantee scheme.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. Friend hopes that one of the results of the Government's current review of grant arrangements will be an extension and improvement of warranty schemes.

Voluntary Bodies (Grants)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the voluntary bodies to which the Scottish Home and Health Department gave grants under section 16B of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978 during 1983-84 and the amount of the grant given in each case.

Mr. Younger: This information is as follows:

	Grant paid 1983-84 £
Scottish Catholic Marriage Advisory Council	602
Scottish Council on Alcoholism	68,000
Family Planning Association	11,160
Community Service Volunteers	14,105
Chest, Heart and Stroke Association	2,725
Action on Smoking and Health	21,850
Scottish National Blood Transfusion Association	2,000
Scottish Council on Disability	23,236
British Association of Immediate Care Schemes (BASIC)	900
NSSPCC Overnewton Clinic	24,010
Arthritis and Rheumatism Council	9,450
Scottish Association for Mental Health	8,450
Age Concern Scotland	7,487
Toy Libraries Association	1,500
Scottish Pre-school Play Groups Association	11,950
Natural Family Planning Group	209
National Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital	1,200
Motability	38,470
Overseas Doctors' Association—Scottish Branch	1,300
Brook Advisory Centre	4,000
National Schizophrenia Fellowship (Scotland)	1,388
Mastectomy Association	410
National Childbirth Trust	1,500
Scottish Epilepsy Association	2,689
TOTAL	258,591

SOCIAL SERVICES

Hospital Beds

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for Social Services for what reasons, other than medical, hospital beds are occupied.

Mr. John Patten: In general, patients occupying hospital beds do so because they require medical investigation, treatment or care, including rehabilitation. Local variations in facilities may mean that some patients, particularly elderly people, receive hospital care as an alternative to care in the community. Some patients in long stay hospitals remain there only because there is nowhere else for them to go. The Care in the Community initiative was launched to facilitate their transfer to more appropriate care.

A small number of beds are set aside for the use of relatives or friends where it is in the best interests of patients that they remain close at hand.

Blind Persons

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total number of supplementary benefit claimants receiving the £1·25 weekly addition for blindness in December 1983; and what was the estimated cost of that addition for the preceding 12 months.

Mr. Newton: The final results of the "Annual Statistical Enquiry" for December 1983 are not yet available. Provisional figures suggest that the number of supplementary benefit claimants receiving the £1·25 weekly addition for blindness in December 1983 was about 36,000, at an estimated total cost in the preceding 12 months of about £2·3 million.

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received from organisations acting for blind people about a blindness allowance.

Mr. Newton: We have received over 100 representations from hon. and right hon. Members referring to a campaign for a blindness allowance organised by the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the National Federation of the Blind and the National League of the Blind and Disabled. I have agreed to meet with representatives from these organisations today.

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the value of the additional allowance payable to a blind person in receipt of supplementary benefit at September 1984 prices if it had been maintained in real terms at the level of its introduction as a separate allowance in July 1948.

Mr. Newton: The extra allowance for blind people on supplementary benefit was 15 shillings (75 pence) in July 1948. On the basis of the index currently used for up-rating supplementary benefit—that is, the retail price index, less the housing costs component — if it had been maintained in real terms at this level its value at September 1984 prices would be £8·06.

District Health Authorities

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were his reasons for requiring district health authorities to fund a proportion of nationally agreed wage awards by local economies or reductions in services.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Wage awards should normally be regarded as an integral part of the costs of health authorities along with all other costs incurred in providing the service funded from within cash limits. Health authorities have had made available to them this year £85 million growth money. In addition, they have themselves released some £100 million through cost improvement programmes. In these circumstances, we decided that health authorities could reasonably bear a part of the cost over 3 per cent. of recent pay awards although we took a step which we are unlikely to repeat of raising cash limits to meet most of that cost.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will make it his policy to maintain the payment of supplementary benefit to teenagers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Financial support for teenagers is within the general remit of both the review of benefits for children and young people, and the review of supplementary benefit, which are currently in progress.

Maternity Allowance

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will now restore the 5 per cent. cut in the maternity allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: When maternity allowance is brought into tax we will consider the restoration of the abatement in the light of the prevailing economic situation.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will now increase the maternity grant to £125 and provide for annual upratings to maintain its value; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The provision of financial help for maternity needs is one of the subjects currently under review.

Disability Benefit

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will now introduce a comprehensive disability benefit paid as of right to those who cannot earn a living due to disability; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We have no plans to do so, but, as I explained in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on 22 October at column *514* we have made useful progress towards our objective of a more coherent system of benefit for disabled people. People who are incapable of work may already qualify for statutory sick pay, sickness benefit, invalidity benefit, non-contributory invalidity pension (to be replaced by severe disablement allowance from 29 November this year) or supplementary benefit.

Severely Handicapped Persons

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of *(a)* severely handicapped children under the age of 15 years and *(b)* severely handicapped adults live with their families.

Mr. Newton: This information is not available.

Pensions

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will bring forward proposals to increase the pensions of pensioners on rates lower than the standard rate of pension by a greater cash amount than the proportion which their pension bears to the full rate of pension.

Mr. Newton: Pensioners who receive pensions at less than the full standard rate do so because they have paid less than the required amount of national insurance

contributions. To increase such reduced rate pensions by a preferential rate would, therefore, be unfair to those who maintained a full contribution record and would undermine the contributory principle of the scheme.

Pensioners whose retirement pension, together with any other income, is insufficient to meet their requirements can, of course, claim supplementary pension.

Fluoridation

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether any warning is given, in areas where water is artificially fluoridated, concerning the possible injurious effects upon health of additional consumption of fluoride tablets or the swallowing of fluoridated toothpaste; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The normal use of fluoride toothpaste in a fluoridated area is not considered to be in any way injurious. "The British National Formulary", which is available to general dental and medical practitioners and pharmacists for the purposes of prescribing under the NHS, contains the advice that

"Fluoride supplements should not be prescribed without prior reference to the fluoride content of the local water supply and are not advisable when the water contains more than 0·7 mg per litre".

The labelling of such supplements when sold over the counter under the supervision of a pharmacist advises that it is unnecessary to take fluoride tablets in areas where water is fluoridated and that purchasers should consult a dental or medical practitioner or pharmacist before administering the preparations.

Single Payments

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the current waiting period for determination of applications for single payments at his Department's office in Pudsey, Leeds 28;

(2) whether he is satisfied with the length of time taken to determine applications for single payments at his Department's office in Pudsey, Leeds 28;

(3) what he is doing to lessen the waiting period for the determination of applications for single payments at his Department's office in Pudsey, Leeds 28.

Mr. Whitney: Claims for single payments are determined as soon as possible after all the information required has been collected. We are satisfied with the special efforts which have been made recently in Pudsey local office to speed up this process. Claims are currently being determined within four weeks of their receipt but many are dealt with sooner.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Young asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many Falkland Islanders are employed by his Department in the Falkland Islands; in what capacity ; and how rates of pay compare with the equivalent grade of British personnel with whom they are working.

Mr. Whitney: None.

Deaf Discrimination

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has now studied the report of the British Deaf Association on deaf discrimination, a copy of which was sent to him; what action he proposes to take; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have read the report with interest, but do not feel that it shows that anti-discrimination legislation would be a practical or effective way of resolving the problems with which it is concerned. I am however arranging to draw the report's comments on particular points to the attention of appropriate colleagues, and the Government will continue to seek ways of helping to meet the difficulties which deaf people can face.

Free Prescriptions

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of branded medicines obtainable without a prescription which were supplied in 1983-84 under prescription were supplied to people entitled to free prescriptions; and what proportion these prescriptions represented of the £120 million per year he referred to on 8 November, *Official Report*, column *226*.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible with as much relevant information as is available although we will not be able to provide figures broken down in the exact form requested.

Chemists (Reimbursement)

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what changes he intends to make to the method of reimbursing chemists to take account of the advantageous prices now available for some drugs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The present contract between the Government and retail pharmacists is based on the reimbursement to the pharmacist of the actual cost of the drugs he dispenses. However, for some time now pharmacists have been able to obtain large discounts when they purchase drugs from wholesalers and this enables some pharmacists to make unintended profits, over and above the negotiated profits in the contract, when we reimburse them at manufacturers' list prices. We attempt to deal with this by withholding some of the reimbursement by an amount representing the usual discount which the pharmacist ought to be able to obtain. We assess the usual level of discount prevailing by holding periodic inquiries. This covers the practice of most pharmacists in a fair way. However, some are now obtaining exceptionally high discounts on some drugs and making large unintended profits when they are reimbursed by the NHS for their NHS prescriptions.

Last May I announced new safety controls on imported drugs and referred to these difficulties. I said then that we were considering with everyone concerned how we could modify the reimbursement system to make the arrangements fairer for the taxpayer, the pharmacists and the pharmaceutical industry. We have now decided to introduce new arrangements setting the amount withheld for deemed discounts at two levels, depending on whether drugs used in a prescription were obtained at ordinary or exceptionally high level. In dealing with this new situation, I want to continue to encourage the system to maintain a reasonable level of discounts generally, without allowing those pharmacists who are able to obtain some drugs at very advantageous prices to make very large unintended profits on a limited range of their supplies. The

round of consultations is now being completed and I propose to introduce the following modifications, to apply to NHS prescriptions dispensed in England and Wales on and after 1 January 1985. The existing reimbursement arrangements will continue, but in addition the pharmacist will be required to endorse those prescriptions for which he has used a drug obtained from whatever source, at a discount of more than 12 per cent. When those prescriptions are prices at single average rate of discount, 20 per cent. of the current drug tariff price, will be applied to them, and reimbursement will therefore be at 80 per cent. of the drug tariff. These arrangements will apply to all discounts, including extended credit, free goods and discounts for cash. I intend to keep this situation on exceptional discounts under very close review and the rates of threshold and single discount to be introduced initially may be changed, as necessary, in the light of information available on discounts generally. Full details of the revised arrangements will be promulgated to pharmacists, family practitioner committees and the pricing authorities as soon as possible.

Cot Deaths

Mr. Knox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what evidence his Department has gathered about the causes of cot deaths; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fowler: There is no evidence to support the view that smothering is the cause of the majority of cot deaths. I deplore any unsubstantiated allegations which might give rise to this impression. Studies point to a variety of factors that may be associated with such deaths, but suggest that there is no single cause. My Department has funded a study on post neonatal mortality, co-ordinated by the medical care research unit at Sheffield University. I expect to receive the report, which will be published, at the end of this month and we shall be considering its findings carefully to see what implications it has both for health service delivery and further research.

Leeds Eastern District Health Authority

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to appoint a new chairman for Leeds eastern district health authority.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 November 1984, c. *47*]: We expect to announce the appointment of a new chairman for Leeds eastern district health authority soon. I am grateful to Professor Barrett for agreeing to continue to serve as chairman for the time being.

Regional and District Health Authorities (Chairmen)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many regional and district health authority chairmanships are currently vacant; and how long the vacancies have existed.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 November 1984, c. *47*]: No regional health authority chairmanships are currently vacant. One district health authority chairmanship [Preston] is currently vacant and has been so since 1 April 1984.

Depo Provera

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, in the light of the findings of the United States Food and Drugs Administration, he will review the continued use of Depo Provera; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984]: A public board of inquiry set up by the United States Government Food and Drugs Administration has, I understand, recommended that Depo Provera should not be licensed in the US for long-term contraceptive use because it considered there was insufficient evidence of the long-term safety of the product. The present position is that the FDA is considering the report, which we have not yet seen. I understand that the manufacturer of Depo Provera intends to file an exception to the recommendation. We will study the board of inquiry's report and the FDA's decision on it as soon as this is known.

We originally refused to license this drug for long-term contraceptive use in 1982. However, evidence of the safety of Depo Provera, including, I understand the evidence considered by the United States board of inquiry, was reviewed in the United Kingdom by a special panel, chaired by Professor Rosalinde Hurley, which held a hearing in public on the issue in 1983 and reported to the Health Ministers in April 1984. As I explained to the House on 11 April 1984 at c. *281-283* we decided that, in the light of the panel's report, Depo Provera should be licensed in the United Kingdom for long-term contraceptive use only where other forms of contraception are unsuitable and subject to certain safeguards. We would review this decision in the light of any significant new evidence about it we received as we would review the licensing of any other drug in such circumstances.

Doctors

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many doctors were unemployed in England and Wales at the latest available date; and what were the corresponding figures for June 1979.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984]: The number registered as unemployed and seeking work as medical practitioners in England and Wales was 316 in June 1979 and 1,288 on 9 September 1982, the last date for which comparable information is available. After October 1982 registration with the Professional and Executive Register of the Manpower Services Commission became voluntary and we can no longer provide comparable figures. The old figures could be taken only as an approximate indication of the number of unemployed doctors at the time. We have no evidence of any significant unemployment of doctors at the present time and we still have some posts which are hard to fill.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the real increase in prescription charges after allowing for inflation in the years 1979 to 1984 for each category of health service charges.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984]: The information is as follows:

	Percentage increase
Prescription charge	389
Pre-payment certificate—annual	320

	Percentage increase
Elastic stocking (single)	108
Elastic hosiery (excluding stockings)	292
Wigs and fabric supports	
Full bespoke human hair wig	317
Partial human hair wig	161
Stock modacrylic wig	292
Abdominal and spinal support	254
Surgical brassiere	125

These increases all start from an artificially low base, in my opinion, as previous Governments had, for reasons not known to me, decided to freeze the level of charges.

Note: The figures have been deflated by the movement in the retail price index between April 1979 and April 1984.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Defence

Mr. Norman Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he agrees with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and United States defence chiefs that nuclear war is a feasible and sound defence strategy and survivable.

Mr. Stanley: The whole purpose of NATO's deterrence strategy is to ensure that neither nuclear nor conventional war ever occurs and that peace with freedom is preserved in Western Europe as it has been for almost 40 years.

General Belgrano

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish as a defence open government document under the Croham directive, background material prepared for Ministers on the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the General Belgrano.

Mr. Heseltine: No. The Prime Minister has already published a detailed account of the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the General Belgrano.

Animals (Research)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the present number of animals being used by his Department for matters concerning defence research.

Mr. Lee: The number of experiments in 1983 was just under 10,000. Figures are kept in a form appropriate to the requirement to report the number of such experiments annually to the Home Department, and the figures for 1984 will be available in due course.

Trident Missile

21. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the latest estimate of the total cost in pounds sterling of the purchase of Trident.

25. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the estimated cost of Trident.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh).

Strategic Forces

22. **Mr. Soley** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his review of strategic forces.

32. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of his review of strategic forces.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson).

Round the World Race (Services Yacht)

23. **Mr. John Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution in terms of funding he expects to make to the services yacht entered in the Whitbread round the world race in 1986.

Mr. Lee: As announced in a written parliamentary Answer on 29 June 1984, we have decided not to enter a services' yacht in the 1985-86 round the world yacht race.

Nuclear Weapons

24. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is satisfied that at all times his Department is fully aware of the position of all nuclear weapons under foreign control in the United Kingdom or United Kingdom territorial waters.

Mr. Stanley: Yes, so far as US nuclear weapons based in this country are concerned. The position in United Kingdom territorial waters at any given moment, of all foreign naval vessels which may or may not be carrying nuclear weapons cannot be known precisely.

New Fighter Aircraft

26. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in talks with France, West Germany, Italy and Spain regarding a new fighter aircraft.

Mr. Butler: I have nothing to add to the answer given to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) on 23 October, at column 550.

Regular Army Reserve

27. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will increase the level of active training available to the Regular Army Reserve.

Mr. Stanley: We already have plans to increase the level of active training available to the Regular Army Reserve. As we announced in SDE 83, we are introducing a scheme which will offer a week of refresher training to Regular Army reservists in their third year out of the Army, and this will begin next year. In addition, Regular Army reservists will continue to have the opportunity to participate in field exercises, including in 1985 the home defence exercise Brave Defender.

Royal Ordnance Factories

28. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the proposed redundancies at the royal ordnance factories.

Mr. Butler: I regret that a significant fall in the forward work load, resulting largely from a reduction in the Ministry's ammunition requirements for 1985-86, made it necessary to announce schemes of redundancy at four royal ordnance factories on 2 November 1984. The total reduction of posts in the worst case will be 1,819 (595 at ROF Birtley, 602 at ROF Bishopton, 145 at ROF Blackburn, 477 at ROF Chorley). These redundancies are in no way due to the impending change of status of the ROFs; as has always been the case, ROF employment levels depend on the state of the order book. All possibilities for additional work continue to be explored.

AQD Laboratories, Harefield

29. **Mr. Shersby** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations have taken place with the trade unions concerning the proposal to close the AQD Laboratories at Harefield.

Mr. Lee: The agreed procedures were followed. The trade unions were informed of the proposal in writing and given an opportunity to comment and meet the official side. After some discussion the decision has now been made to withdraw the quality assurance elements.

RAF Trainer

30. **Mr. Colvin** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to make an announcement on the preferred design for the new AST 412 trainer for the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Butler: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope).

Departmental Costs

31. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what further action he is taking to control the total running costs of his Department.

Mr. Butler: We have made clear our intention to reduce the running costs of the Department. This is being achieved by such means as changes in organisation and working practices, the contractorisation of tasks and a continuing process of review and cost monitoring. I would refer my hon. Friend to chapter 2 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1984" and also to the reply given by my predecessor to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) on 10 July, at column 449, where some of these measures — and the resultant benefits — are noted. The reorganisation of the Department, which was announced in Cmnd. 9315, will come into effect on 2 January 1985.

Trident Missiles

33. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the likely total cost to public expenditure of the purchase of the Trident missile system.

34. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimate for the cost of the Trident weapon system.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member and my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh).

Cruise Missiles

35. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many land-based cruise missiles have been deployed in the United Kingdom; what further deployments are planned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: The then Secretary of State for Defence announced on 17 June 1980 that six flights of ground-launched cruise missiles would be based at RAF Greenham common and four at RAF Molesworth. These plans have not changed. As I explained in answer to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on 26 June, information on the deployment of nuclear forces, including ground-launched cruise missiles, will be provided in the annual "Statement on the Defence Estimates".

Greenham Common

36. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to visit Greenham common; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend has visited RAF Greenham common previously and has no immediate plans to visit again.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the security situation at Greenham common.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 24 July 1984, at column 805.

Recruitment

37. **Mr. Neil Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about progress with recruiting for the armed services.

Mr. Stanley: Overall recruiting to the armed services remains good. In 1983-84 some 37,000 men and women entered the armed services on regular engagements and this year we expect to recruit a similar number. Recruiting targets are generally being met except for a few areas such as some officer categories, technicians and skilled tradesmen.

Nuclear Tests (Australia)

38. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what consultation he has had with the Australian Government about the Royal Commission which is investigating British nuclear tests carried out in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s; and if he will make a statement on the evidence which has been given by Australian ex-service men regarding activities within the purview of his Department.

Mr. Butler: In accordance with the Prime Minister's assurances to Mr. Hawke, the Australian Prime Minister, and as indicated by my predecessor the hon. Member for Chertsey and Walton (Mr. Pattie) in answer to a question

on 27 July, at column 838, Her Majesty's Government are co-operating fully with the Australian Government in dealing with the Royal Commission. I am not prepared to comment on the evidence which is reported to have been given by Australian ex-service men.

United States Export Administration Act

39. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many computers there are in his Department over which the United States could claim extra-territorial jurisdiction under the United States Export Administration Act; and whether he has any policy about compliance with that Act as to the movements of such computers.

Mr. Butler: The majority of MOD computers are of United Kingdom manufacture. United States export control regulations have no force in United Kingdom law and the Ministry of Defence makes its own decisions on the use and deployment of its computers.

Falkland Islands

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Falkland islanders are employed by his Department in the Falkland Islands; in what capacity; and how rates of pay compare with the equivalent grade of British personnel with whom they are working.

Mr. Stanley: There are none at the present time.

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many people, civil and military, have been transported to Britain from the Falkland Islands for medical treatment since the cessation of hostilities in the Falklands; and if he will estimate the cost of this service *(a)* for military personnel and *(b)* for civilians.

Mr. Stanley: 620 military personnel and 140 civilians have been flown to Britain from the Falkland Islands for medical treatment up to the end of September 1984. The air passages have been on scheduled RAF flights and the notional cost to the Department of the space occupied, either by seated patients or patients on stretchers is some £1,500 a patient.

Mr. David Young asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel are on their second, third or any subsequent tour in the Falklands; how many of them *(a)* are in receipt of the Falklands allowance and *(b)* are not; and if he will consider changing the rules relating to the payment of the allowances payable after a certain number of days in the Falklands in that or any subsequent tour.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *152*]: This information is not held centrally and could not be obtained except at disproportionate cost. However, we estimate that during the course of a year approximately 550 Royal Navy, 400 Army and 230 RAF personnel may receive the Falkland Islands allowance. The consideration of changes to the rules for the allowance is a matter for the Armed Forces Pay Review Body in the first instance, which has said that it will keep it under constant review.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has consulted either of the logs of HMS Conqueror when answering parliamentary questions relating to the movements of HMS Conqueror during the Falklands war.

Mr. Heseltine: I understand that the account of the captain of HMS Conqueror and his formal report of proceedings have been consulted during the preparation of answers to parliamentary questions relating to the movements of HMS Conqueror during the Falklands campaign. Given the information contained in the capatain's narrative account and his formal report of proceedings, it had not been necessary to consult the control room log for this purpose. It was for this reason that its disappearance did not come to light until the hon. Member asked about the "log of Conqueror's movements" for 2 to 4 May 1982, which prompted officials to ask to see the control room log in addition to the documents already available to them.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he became aware that the navigational log of HMS Conqueror was missing.

Mr. Heseltine: As I explained yesterday in answer to questions from the hon. Members for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), the first indications that the control room log could be missing appeared in the first week of October, when an official in my Department asked to see it in the context of dealing with inquiries from the hon. Member. Initial attempts to locate the log in the archives, at the naval headquarters at Northwood, and on board the submarine, proved unsuccessful, although an increasingly intensive search was mounted in the first half of October. I was not personally involved at this stage, although my office was aware that a search was under way. On 17 October the apparent disappearance of the log was formally reported to the offices of Ministers and senior MOD management concerned.

The log is a classified document. As the Prime Minister pointed out to the hon. Member in her letter to him of 8 October and repeated in her written answer to him of 22 October, at columns *788-791*, there could be no question of placing a classified document of this kind, or extracts from it, in the House of Commons Library or publishing it in any way. But, given the importance of tracing a missing classified document, a full search was mounted and a formal board of inquiry established on 25 October. I was myself informed of where matters stood shortly after my return from the middle east at the beginning of November.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the missing log of HMS Conqueror contains details of HMS Conqueror's movements and position from 2 to 4 May 1982.

Mr. Heseltine: I would expect that to be the case.

Mr. Foulkes: asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the navigational log of HMS Conqueror has been seen by any officials of his Department since the end of the Falklands conflict.

Mr. Heseltine: That is a matter for the board of inquiry.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the navigational log of HMS Conqueror has been seen by Ministers since the end of the Falklands conflict.

Mr. Heseltine: No.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the commander's log of HMS Conqueror has been in the Ministry of Defence since the end of the Falklands conflict.

Mr. Heseltine: The account of the captain of HMS Conqueror has been in the possession of the flag officer submarines since the beginning of July 1982.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in full the report of the board of inquiry into the loss of the navigational log of HMS Conqueror.

Mr. Heseltine: It is not our practice to publish reports of boards of inquiry. I will consider whether to make a statement once the report of the board of inquiry is available.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what security classification was attached to the missing log of HMS Conqueror.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 12 November to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell).

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any photographic reproduction or other copy of the missing log of HMS Conqueror is available to him.

Mr. Heseltine: No.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Defence if military personnel have been on duty outside collieries in 1984 in connection with the coal industry dispute.

Mr. Stanley: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Barnsley, East (Mr. Patchett) on 21 May 1984, at column *372*.

Ships' Logs

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the arrangements for keeping navigational and captains' logs of Her Majesty's ships; and whether they are normally kept together.

Mr. Heseltine: Instructions for keeping navigational logs are laid down in Queen's Regulations for the Royal Navy, which are available in the Library. Completed logs for both submarines and surface ships are sent to the Ministry of Defence records office. In addition, the flag officer submarines issues instructions for the keeping by submarines of detailed narrative accounts of exercises and operations, to support the commanding officer's formal report of proceedings submitted to his operational commander.

British Army of the Rhine

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current cost of maintaining the British Army of the Rhine; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: As stated in table 2.3 in volume II of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1984", the cost of the British Army of the Rhine is estimated to be some £1,796 million in 1984-85 at 1984-85 Estimates prices.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 14 November 1984

NORTHERN IRELAND

Labour Statistics

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list the percentage of unemployed in Ulster on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest available date;

(2) if he will list the percentage of unemployment in Belfast on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date;

(3) if he will list the level of unemployment in the city of Belfast on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Boyson: The number of unemployed in each constituency and ward at October 1984 is as follows. Unemployment rates are available only for travel-to-work areas.

The decrease shown by the October figures is to be welcomed and largely counterbalances the increase in the previous month. These changes are largely due to seasonal influences. I am encouraged by the longer-term changes in unemployment trends. The underlying upward trend has slowed and we are seeing a greater stability in the numbers in employment.

Numbers of unemployed in Northern Ireland by ward and constituency
Numbers of unemployed claimants in parliamentary constituencies on 11 October 1984

Parliamentary constituency	*Total unemployed*
Belfast East	4,513
Belfast North	8,571
Belfast South	5,544
Belfast West	12,443
East Antrim	6,921
East Londonderry	8,358
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	7,971
Foyle	11,943
Lagan Valley	5,860
Mid-Ulster	8,122
Newry and Armagh	8,705
North Antrim	5,955
North Down	4,126
South Antrim	5,985
South Down	6,045
Strangford	4,152
Upper Bann	6,737
Northern Ireland Total	121,951

District Council	*Ward*	*Total unemployed*
Belfast East		
Belfast	Orangefield	306
	The Mount	456
	Island	416
	Ballymacarrett	622
	Sydenham	419
	Bloomfield	345
	Shandon	325
	Belmont	386
	Stormont	310
	Ballyhackamore	374
Castlereagh	Lisnasharragh	185
	Downshire	140
	Cregagh	118
	Wynchurch	111
	Total	4,513
Belfast North		
Belfast	Shankill	550
	Woodvale	650
	Lagoniel	505
	Ardoyne	1,047
	Ballysillan	468
	Cliftonville	863
	Crumlin	653
	Cavehill	546
	Castleview	465
	Fortwilliam	346
	Grove	530
	Duncairn	596
	New Lodge	919
	Bellevue	433
	Total	8,571
Belfast South		
Belfast	Rosetta	322
	Ballynafeigh	498
	Ormeau	326
	Willowfield	360
	Finaghy	272
	Upper Malone	361
	Stranmillis	286
	Malone	230
	Donegall	585
	University	930
	Windsor	658
	St. Georges	279
	Cromac	437
	Total	5,544
Belfast West		
Belfast	Ladybrook	1,057
	Suffolk	1,667
	Andersonstown	726
	Milltown	1,272
	St. James	1,134
	Whiterock	1,729
	Highfield	633
	Clonard	1,036
	Grosvenor	310
	Falls	688
	North Howard	315
	Court	478
	Ballygomartin	838
	Central	560
	Total	12,443
East Antrim		
Larne	Carnlough	202
	Glenarm	122
	Carncastle	88
	Island Magee	69
	Ballycarry	106
	Glynn	85
	Kilwaughter	91
	Harbour	102
	Blackcave	333
	Town Parks	75
	Gardenmore	177
	Central	190

District Council	Ward	Total unemployed
	Craigyhill	131
	Antiville	267
	Ballyloran	269
Newtownabbey	Whitehouse	243
	Whiteabbey	272
	Rostulla	101
	Cloughfern	192
	Monkstown	311
	Dunanney	266
	Coole	265
	Bradan	244
	Hopefield	398
Carrickfergus	Lower Greenisland	199
	Middle Greenisland	163
	Knockagh	90
	Woodburn	126
	Blackhead	120
	Whitehead	104
	Troopers Lane	82
	Castle	84
	Clipperstown	315
	Northland	161
	Sunnyland	118
	Love Lane	346
	Eden	144
	Boneybefore	119
	Victoria	151
	Total	6,921
East Londonderry		
Limavady	Gresteel	220
	Wallworth	105
	Glack	110
	The Highlands	178
	Feeny	135
	Dungiven	331
	Upper Glenshane	88
	Forest	148
	Magilligan	106
	Myroe	163
	Aghanloo	110
	Roeside	199
	Coolessan	234
	Binevenagh	115
	Rathabrady	236
Coleraine	Kilrea	151
	Garvagh	182
	Agivey	113
	Ringsend	135
	Dunluce	114
	Knockantern	156
	Ballywillin	227
	Strand	170
	Portstewart	172
	Portrush	210
	Dhu Varren	238
	Castlerock	172
	Macosquin	195
	The Cuts	187
	Churchland	105
	Waterside	157
	Mount Sandel	127
	Central	299
	University	330
	Cross Glebe	317
Magherafelt	Swatragh	149
	Upperlands	127
	Valley	166
	Lower Glenshane	194
	Maghera	303
	Gulladuff	113
	Tobermore	100
	Knockcloghrim	144
	Bellaghy	206
	Castledawson	200
	Townparks West	145
	Townparks East	276
	Total	8,358
Fermanagh and South Tyrone		
Dungannon	Fivemiletown	107
	Clogher	110
	Augher	132
	Washing Bay	255
	Coalisland North	319
	Coalisland South	415
	Killyman	144
	Moy	135
	Ballygawley	215
	Caledon	129
	Benburb	190
	Aughnacloy	89
	Castlecoalfield	153
	Altmore	223
	Donaghmore	226
	Moygashel	83
	Drumglass	200
	Lisnahull	390
	Killymaddy	126
	Killymeal	161
Fermanagh	Rosslea	335
	Newtownbutler	295
	Lisnaskea	404
	Brookeborough	121
	Maguiresbridge	117
	Tempo	162
	Lisbellaw	159
	Derrylin	173
	Florencecourt and Kinawley	176
	Belcoo and Belmore	250
	Derrygonnelly	150
	Garrison	142
	Belleek and Boa	214
	Kesh, Ederny Lack	240
	Irvinestown	281
	Ballinamallard	199
	Castlecoole	167
	Erne	110
	Rossory	172
	Devenish	302
	Total	7,971
Foyle		
Derry	Banagher	233
	Claudy	311
	Eglinton	272
	Prehen	287
	Enagh	274
	Faughan	467
	Caw	376
	Altnagelvin	319
	Ebrington	108
	Clondermott	330
	Victoria	249
	Crevagh	547
	Creggan South	397
	Creggan Central	530
	Beechwood	270
	Brandywell	340
	Riverside	161
	St. Columb's Wells	201
	The Diamond	243
	Westland	327
	Waterloo	208
	Strand	335
	Rosemount	290
	Springtown	529
	Pennyburn	227

District Council	Ward	Total unemployed
	Shantallow	1,448
	Culmore	596
Strabane	Dunnamanagh	196
	Slievekirk	156
	Artigarvan	225
	Strabane North	257
	Strabane West	503
	Strabane East	353
	Strabane South	378
	Total	11,943
Lagan Valley		
Lisburn	Glenavy	213
	Tullyrusk	236
	Magheragall	142
	Maze	159
	Hillsborough	111
	Ballymacbrennan	81
	Dromara	74
	Blaris	156
	Hillhall	266
	Knockmore	264
	Old Warren	445
	Lagan Valley	174
	Tonagh	140
	Lisnagarvy	286
	Magheralave	218
	Hilden	155
	Lambeg	196
	Derryaghy	214
	Seymourhill	251
	Dunmurry	184
	Collin	1,526
	Moira	112
	Drumbo	82
Castlereagh	Carryduff	175
	Total	5,860
Mid-Ulster		
Strabane	Glenderg	232
	Castlederg	301
	Clare	228
	Newtownstewart	259
	Plumbridge	162
	Victoria Bridge	146
	Sion Mills	232
	Finn	269
Omagh	Trillick	121
	Fintona	242
	Dromore	180
	Drumquin	177
	Clanabogan	110
	Newtownsaville	131
	Beragh	150
	Fairywater	100
	Strule	123
	Omagh West	200
	Fairgreen	173
	Killyclogher	436
	Dergmoney	84
	Omagh East	85
	Drumragh	23
	Gortin	131
	Owenglen	129
	Drumnakilly	230
	Carrickmore	196
	Sixmilecross	175
Magherafelt	Draperstown	252
	Lecumpher	163
	Ballymaguigon	155
Cookstown	Dunnamore	200
	Pomeroy	208
	Lissan	88
	Oaklands	101
	Sandholes	113
	Moneymore	112
	Coagh	134
	Stewartstown	158
	The Loop	151
	Ardboe	303
	Killycolpy	233
	Oldtown	101
	Newbuildings	117
	Tullagh	224
	Gortalowry	284
	Total	8,122
Newry and Armagh		
Armagh	Charlemount	180
	Loughgall	149
	Hockley	99
	Laurelvale	92
	Tandragee	169
	Poyntzpass	112
	Market Hill	183
	Carrigatuke	284
	Keady	182
	Derrynosse	207
	Killylea	166
	Ballymortrim	163
	Richhill	116
	Milford	162
	Killeen	205
	Lisanally	280
	The Mall	70
	Demesne	133
	Downs	331
	Lurgyvallen	258
Newry and Mourne	Fathom	308
	Forkhill	305
	Creggan	319
	Crossmaglen	412
	Newtownhamilton	262
	Camlough	252
	Belleek	272
	Tullyhappy	163
	Bessbrook	302
	Derrymore	328
	Ballybot	401
	Drumgullion	357
	Windsorhill	287
	Daisy Hill	302
	St. Patrick's	166
	Drumalone	321
	St. Mary's	407
	Total	8,705
North Antrim		
Moyle	Glenariff	93
	Glenaan	108
	Glendun	120
	Glensbesk	81
	Armoy	103
	Carnmoon	67
	Ballylough	64
	Bushmills	153
	Dunseverick	47
	Ballintoy	29
	Moss-side	51
	Kinbane	75
	Dalriada	87
	Quay	83
	Knocklayd	165
	Rathlin	8
Ballymoney	Seacon	101
	Benvardin	138
	Stranocum	102
	Dervock	97

District Council	Ward	Total unemployed
	Ballyhoe and Corkey	129
	Kilraghts	57
	Castlequarter	79
	Dunloy	121
	Killoquin Lower	83
	Killoquin Upper	126
	The Vow	110
	Newhill	131
	Town Parks	137
	Fairhill	34
	The Hills	74
	Cloughmills	81
Ballymena	Glenravel	191
	Dunminning	65
	Craigywarren	65
	Broughshane	112
	Slemish	62
	Portglenow	138
	Cullybackey	99
	Ahoghill	82
	Grange	94
	Kells	107
	Glenwherry	58
	Ballee	257
	Harryville	184
	Ballykeel	315
	Galgorm	161
	Waveney	89
	Castle Demesne	127
	Park	90
	Fairgreen	280
	Dunclug	336
	Ballyloughan	109
	Total	5,955
North Down		
North Down	Groomsport	157
	Churchill	86
	Ballyholme	61
	Ballymagee	257
	Bangor Harbour	150
	Conlig	387
	Bangor Castle	160
	Whitehill	253
	Rathgael	161
	Clandeboye	313
	Silverstream	192
	Springhill	74
	Bryansburn	77
	Princetown	76
	Crawfordsburn	120
	Craigavad	45
	Loughview	205
	Cultra	65
	Holywood Demesne	91
	Holywood Priory	109
Castlereagh	Ballyhanwood	147
	Carrowcreagh	329
	Dundonald	102
	Erler	194
	Gilnahirk	90
	Tullycarnet	225
	Total	4,126
South Antrim		
Antrim	Toome	249
	Drumanaway	126
	Cranfield	143
	Randalstown	120
	Tardree	100
	Parkgate	75
	Balloo	150
	Massemene	226
	Parkhall	406
	Stiles	1,216
	Ballycraigy	120
	Templepatrick	129
	Ballyrobin	62
	Aldergrove	106
	Crumlin	120
Newtownabbey	Mallusk	106
	Doagh	143
	Ballynure	86
	Ballyeaston	217
	Ballyclare	198
	Jordanstown	228
	Mossgrove	160
	Mossley	345
	Carnmoney	497
	Ballyhenry	196
	Glengormley	280
	Whitewell	181
	Total	5,985
South Down		
Newry and Mourne	Annalong	181
	Binnian	95
	Kilkeel	195
	Cranfield	209
	Lisnacree	139
	Rostrevor	215
	Speiga	333
	Rathfriland	50
	Drumgath	198
	Ballycrossan	185
	Clonallan	207
	Seaview	255
	Donaghmore	131
Banbridge	Annaclone	110
	Drumadonnell	55
	Garran	89
	Croob	71
	Ballyoolymore	80
	Quilly	81
	Skeagh	79
	Dromore	134
Down	Saintfield	90
	Derryboy	83
	Killyleagh	102
	Crossgar	69
	Kilmore	135
	Ballymaglave	128
	Market	134
	Strangford	116
	Ardglass	155
	Killough	109
	Dundrum	146
	Castlewellan	208
	Tullymore	180
	Donard	128
	Shimna	276
	Dunmore	152
	Seaforde	61
	Cuoile	254
	Audleys Acre	123
	Cathedral	304
	Total	6,045
Strangford		
Ards	Portaferry	209
	Kircubbin	168
	Ballyhalbert	141
	Greyabbey	164
	Carrowdore	206
	Donaghadee North	104
	Donaghadee South	181
	Loughries	211
	Movilla	311
	Glen	268

District Council	Ward	Total unemployed
	Scrabo	117
	Ulsterville	174
	Central	366
	Comber North	215
	Comber South	114
	Ballygowan	157
	Killinchy	57
Castlereagh	Moneyreagh	112
	Upper Braniel	141
	Lower Braniel	105
	Hillfoot	106
	Four Winds	104
	Beechill	111
	Newtownbreda	131
	Minnowburn	179
	Total	4,152
Upper Bann		
Craigavon	The Birches	191
	Breagh	79
	Kinnegoe	176
	Kernan	191
	Bleary	115
	Waringstown	120
	Magheralin	106
	Aghagallon	228
	Hartfield	140
	Edgarstown	272
	Woodside	380
	Bachelors Walk	69
	Killycomain	163
	Annagh	106
	Bronnstown	134
	Tavanagh	161
	Bellvue	291
	Knockashane	90
	Mourneview	162
	Woodville	602
	Court	153
	Taghnevan	313
	Church	175
	Parklake	122
	Brownlow	1,193
Banbridge	Gilford	122
	Lawrencetown	100
	Loughbrickland	139
	Seapatrick	127
	Edenderry	208
	Central	153
	Ballydown	156
	Total	6,737

Note:

The allocation of unemployed claimants to wards is based on the address given by each claimant. In some cases such as those with no fixed abode the claimant is allocated to the ward in which the benefit office handling the claim is located.

Health and Social Services Boards

Mr. Beggs asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he has taken, or intends to take, in regard to the report by the Northern Ireland Comptroller and Auditor General on the 1982-83 accounts of health and social services boards about financial control of the health and social services accounts for North and West Belfast district of the eastern board.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have expressed my concern to the chairman of the eastern board and the board is taking urgent action to remedy deficiencies in financial control in the former North and West Belfast district. The district is now reorganised into three units of management; new senior staff are in post and new systems are being introduced. The board is to provide regular progress reports on these matters to the Department.

Mr. Beggs asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if disciplinary action has been taken against any member of staff in connection with financial abuses in the North and West Belfast district of the Eastern Health and Social Services Board in 1982-83.

Mr. Chris Patten: No, but the board's investigation is continuing.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Governing Bodies (Representation)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the Government's policy towards proposals for statutory student representation on school governing bodies; and whether any studies on this issue are currently, or have been, undertaken by his Department.

Mr. Dunn: The Government's proposals for the future composition of school governing bodies in the Green Paper "Parental Influence at School" (Cmnd. 9242) did not include provision for pupil governors. The Department has undertaken no particular study of this issue, nor does it expect to do so.

Medical Research Council

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many projects the Medical Research Council has labelled approved but not funded in the last year; which projects they are; and what plans there are for their future funding and research.

Mr. Brooke: In the academic year 1983-84 the Medical Research Council approved but was unable to fund 199 applications for project grants — usually of three years' duration—and 22 applications for longer-term support for research programmes. I understand that the projects cover a wide range of biomedical research, but that their details are regarded as confidential as between the council and the applicants. I understand that the council has no plans for a systematic reconsideration of these applications.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children from Essex have received places under the assisted places scheme in each of the years since the scheme was introduced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Information is not collected on the home address of assisted pupils. The numbers of pupils admitted to assisted places in the four participating schools in Essex have been as follows:

School year	Number of assisted pupils
1981-82	55
1982-83	60
1983-84	72
1984-85	63

Student Grants

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about levels of student grants and parental contributions in 1985-86.

Mr. Brooke: Subject to parliamentary approval, the main rates of student grant will be increased by around 3 per cent. in 1985-86. The parental contribution scale will be adjusted upwards in line with earnings, but contributions from those in the middle and upper reaches of the scale will be increased. The minimum maintenance award will be abolished and parents at the upper end of the scale will also be assessed to contribute towards designated tuition fees. For those families with more than one award-holder there will be a limit on their contribution of £4,000.

The following table compares the proposed parental contribution scale for 1985-86 with the existing scale for 1984-85:

Parental contribution scale

Residual Income £	*1984-85 Contribution* £	*1985-86 Contribution* £
7,600	20	—
7,800	48	—
8,000	77	—
8,100	91	20
8,200	105	34
8,400	134	62
8,600	162	91
8,800	191	120
9,000	220	148
9,500	291	220
9,700	320	248
10,000	370	291
10,100	386	305
10,200	403	320
10,300	420	334
10,400	436	354
10,500	453	374
11,000	536	474
12,000	703	674
13,000	870	874
14,000	1,036	1,074
15,000	1,203	1,274
15,500	1,286	1,399
16,000	1,370	1,524
17,000	1,536	1,774
18,000	1,703	2,024
19,000	1,870	2,274
20,000	2,036	2,524
21,000	2,203	2,774
22,000	2,370	3,024
23,000	2,536	3,274
24,000	2,703	3,524
25,000	2,870	3,774
*†	*	†

* Scale continues at £1 for every complete £6 of additional income.

† Scale continues at £1 for every complete £4 of additional income to a maximum contribution of £4,000.

Notes:

1. For 1985-86 the rate of contribution is assessed at £1 in £7 for residual incomes from £8,100 to £10,300; then £1 in £5 to £15,000; then £1 in £4 thereafter. In 1984-85 the rate of contribution was assessed at £1 in £7 for residual incomes from £7,600 to £9,700; then £1 in £6 thereafter.

2. The contribution payable may be less than the amounts shown in the scale, particularly at its top end. This will depend on the amount of the award (maintenance and fees) towards which the contribution has to be made and whether any of the assessed contribution is offset by allowances for other dependent children.

3. In 1985-86 there will be a maximum parental contribution of £4,000 per family which will protect families with more than one award-holder.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Dr. Alan Clift

Mr. Ashley asked the Attorney-General at whose instigation the Director of Public Prosecutions investigation into the alleged irregularities in the work of Dr. Clift was undertaken; how long the investigation took; how many cases were considered; which forensic experts helped with the inquiry; what was the result of the inquiry; and if a press statement was released regarding the decision not to take criminal proceedings against Dr. Clift.

The Attorney-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions asked the police to look into alleged irregularities in the work of Dr. Clift after the matter had been referred to him by the Home Office. The investigation lasted from 12 September 1977 to 11 October 1978 and was carried out by an officer from the Devon and Cornwall constabulary. In the course of that investigation 59 cases in which Dr. Clift had been involved were considered. Dr. Margaret Pereira was seconded to help with the police inquiry. The decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions was that the available evidence was not such as to justify any criminal proceedings against Dr. Clift. There was no press release by the Home Office at the time of the Director's decision, but the information was confirmed on request.

Offenders (Trial Delays)

Mr. Skeet asked the Attorney-General what caused the delay in bringing offenders to trial in the cases of the petty sessional divisions of Chesterfield, Rotherham, Mansfield, St. Helens and Peterlee prior to the coal industry dispute in March; what is the position today; and what are the dates of the appointment of every new stipendiary to these benches, the number of cases tried by each since their appointment and the number of cases remaining to be tried in these areas.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply.

I understand from inquiries that have been made in the first three months of 1984 defendants pleading not guilty before these courts were normally tried within six to eight weeks of entering their plea. That waiting time was necessary to enable the prosecution and defence to prepare their case. Defendants pleading guilty in person were normally sentenced within three weeks or less.

The position with regard to guilty pleas at these courts remains unchanged. Mainly because of the extra business generated by the miners' dispute, the waiting time between a not guilty plea and trial is now approximately 12 weeks in Chesterfield and Mansfield; eight to 10 weeks at Rotherham; nine weeks at St. Helens and eight weeks at Peterlee.

Stipendiaries have sat at these courts at the following times:

Chesterfield	—	One from 3 to 12 October; two since 15 October
Rotherham	—	One since 3 September
Mansfield	—	One from 5 to 16 November

St. Helens — One on ten days between 10 October and 8 November; more dates arranged up to 12 December
Peterlee — One from 22 to 26 October.

Information is not readily available about the numbers of cases they have tried, but, in view of the wide variation in the time needed to deal with individual cases, this would not in any event provide a reliable indication of the stipendiaries' usefulness in relieving pressure on the courts. We understand that the stipendiaries have not been confined to dealing with cases arising from the miners' dispute. The number of cases arising from the dispute which remained outstanding on 8 November at each of these courts is as follows:

	Numbers
Chesterfield	454
Rotherham	214
Mansfield	296
St. Helens	80
Peterlee	60

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

West Germany

56. **Mr. Lambie** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met his West German counterpart to discuss matters relating to the European Community; and what subjects were discussed.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I last discussed European Community matters with Herr Genscher at the Foreign Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 22 and 23 October. Discussions at that meeting concentrated on the negotiations for Spanish and Portuguese accession.

Spanish Accession

58. **Mr. Forth** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the benefits to the people of the United Kingdom of Spanish accession to the European Economic Community; and on what institutional, financial and economic conditions the United Kingdom will support Spanish accession.

Mr. Rifkind: The United Kingdom has given consistent support to the principle of Spanish and Portuguese accession, which we believe to be important for the consolidation of democracy and stability in Europe. In acceding to the Community, Spain will be accepting the rules and regulations of the Community — the acquis Communautaire. Detailed negotiations on transitional arrangements representing a fair balance between the interests of the member states and of the applicant countries are still in progress.

British Rebate

61. **Dr. McDonald** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the 1984 ad hoc British rebate agreed at Fontainebleau is included in the draft 1985 Community budget.

Mr. Rifkind: No. It was confirmed at the Foreign Affairs Council on 2 and 3 October that our 1984 rebate should be made on the revenue side by abatement of our VAT contribution, as agreed at Fontainebleau.

European Union

62. **Sir Anthony Meyer** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he now considers that the necessity for improved decision making in the EEC requires some advance towards the concept of European union.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Fontainebleau European Council set up an ad hoc committee to look into the improved operation of the Community. Better decision-making is one of the many topics under discussion. I should not wish to anticipate the committee's conclusions; but the first priority is clearly to concentrate on securing full implementation of the existing treaty.

Budget Discipline

63. **Mr. McKelvey** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of budget discipline discussions at recent Foreign Affairs Council meetings.

65. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in securing financial discipline over the European Economic Community budget.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Considerable progress has been made. A text guaranteeing the effective application of the principles agreed by Heads of Government was substantially agreed at the Council of Finance Ministers and the Foreign Affairs Council this week. We hope this text will be formally adopted at the Foreign Affairs Council later this month.

Spain and Portugal

64. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he now expects the accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Economic Community to take place.

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd).

Financial Obligations

66. **Mr. Straw** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the details of the intergovernmental agreement to cover the Community's inescapable financial obligations for 1984.

Mr. Rifkind: A copy of the agreement has been placed in the Library of the House.

Reforms

67. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement outlining the progress made in securing reforms in the Common Market during the summer adjournment.

Mr. Rifkind: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) on 23 October, at column 538, considerable progress has been made towards resolving the outstanding budget issues. At the Foreign Affairs Council on 2-3 October member states reaffirmed their

commitment to paying the United Kingdom's abatement for 1984 on the revenue side of the budget in 1985 as agreed at Fontainebleau. The Council also concluded an inter-governmental agreement covering the Community's inescapable financial obligations for 1984. The United Kingdom made it clear that its contribution to this arrangement depended upon release of our 1983 refunds and agreement on a budget discipline text which implements the conclusions of the European Council. Work to complete this text, and the text of the new own resources decision, is continuing. The European Parliament voted on 10 October to release the United Kingdom's refunds for 1983.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Oil Exploration and Production Equipment

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total value of imports of oil exploration and production equipment in the years *(a)* 1982 and *(b)* 1983.

Mr. Fletcher: The fob value of goods imported for the exploration, development and production of United Kingdom continental shelf oil and gas is given in table 9.1 of the "United Kingdom Balance of Payments" (1984 edition), which is available in the Library.

Johnson Group Cleaners (Merseyside)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what representations he has received concerning the proposed takeover bid by Nottingham Manufacturing Company for Johnson Group Cleaners (Merseyside); and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will refer the take over bid by Nottingham manufacturing Co. for Johnson Group Cleaners (Merseyside) to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission;

(3) if he will refer to the Office of Fair Trading the takeover bid for the Johnson Group Cleaners (Merseyside) by the Nottingham Manufacturing Company.

Mr. Fletcher: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Mr. John Preece (Appeal Court Transcript)

Mr. Ashley asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will arrange for the transcription of the shorthand notes of the John Preece Appeal Court hearing; and if he will place it in the Library.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: Shorthand notes were taken of evidence given on 9, 10, 11 and 12 June 1981 at the Appeal Court in the case of John Preece. These could be extended at a cost of approximately £1,000. I am not persuaded that such expense is justified.

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet Committees

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Prime Minister if she will give the numbers and names of the Cabinet committees and sub-committees, both ad hoc and permanent, currently in operation.

The Prime Minister: There continue to be four standing committees of the Cabinet: a defence and overseas policy committee and an economic strategy committee under my chairmanship; a home and social affairs committee under the chairmanship of my right Hon. and noble Friend the Lord President of the Council; and a legislation committee under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Lord Privy Seal. Attendance at these committees will vary according to the subject under discussion. Sub-committees of the standing committees will be continued or established as appropriate. Membership and terms of reference of the standing committees and their sub-committees will remain confidential.

WALES

Roads

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will show for each county council *(a)* provisional outturn expenditure in 1983-84, *(b)* planned expenditure in 1984-85 and 1985-86 on (i) highway structural maintenance, (ii) highway routine maintenance and (iii) highway capital.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: Information about planned expenditure by local highway authorities for 1984-85 and 1985-86 is not held centrally.

Provisional outturn expenditure for 1983-84 on highway maintenance and highway capital is as follows. No breakdown between structural and general maintenance is available.

	Maintenance	*£'000 Capital*
Clwyd	9,081	5,700
Dyfed	11,427	5,585
Gwent	6,233	15,013
Gwynedd	7,211	3,875
MidGlamorgan	10,039	7,533
Powys	7,051	2,846
South Glamorgan	6,020	11,027
West Glamorgan	5,507	4,448

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for the years 1982, 1983 and 1984, the numbers of kilometres of *(a)* trunk motorways, *(b)* other trunk roads, *(c)* local authority motorways, *(d)* other principal roads and *(e)* other roads.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: The information requested is as follows:

Road Lengths in Wales

	Kilometres		
	1982	*1983*	*1984*
(a) Trunk motorways	120	120	120
(b) Other trunk roads	1,645	1,648	1,654
(c) Local authority motorways	Nil	Nil	Nil

	Kilometres		
	1982	1983	1984
(d) Other principal roads	2,445	2,462	2,477
(e) Other roads	27,830	28,110	28,150
*Total	32,039	32,339	32,400

* Figures do not add to common totals because of rounding.

Holyhead

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will consider special measures to alleviate the level of unemployment in Holyhead.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Every opportunity is taken and will continue to be pursued to safeguard employment and provide new jobs in the area, which is well placed to benefit from both domestic and European assistance. Existing policies and programmes, including in general the work of agencies within Wales with a remit to develop the economic potential of the Principality, provide for employment and training opportunities, grants for industrial projects, programmes of infrastructure development including road construction and factory building, urban programme and European Community schemes.

Housing

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the latest estimate of the number of dwellings in Wales which are in need of *(a)* standard amenities and *(b)* repairs costing £2,500 or more; and if he will estimate the cost of bringing these dwellings up to a reasonable standard.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The 1981 Welsh House Condition Survey indicates that about 84,000 dwellings lacked one or more of the basic amenities and that about 250,000 dwellings (excluding second homes) needed repairs in excess of £2,500. At that time the cost of providing amenities and of eliminating disrepair over the £2,500 limit was estimated to be about £850 million.

Housing Improvement Grants

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will ensure that housing improvement grants are paid only against proper value added tax registered invoices and not against estimates;

(2) what proposals he has to ensure that housing improvement grant work is carried out only by competent and bona fide builders;

(3) if he is satisfied that the present improvement grant system ensures that public funds are spent cost-effectively and are concentrated on those properties most in need.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: We have been reviewing the workings of the renovation grant system as part of our overall examination of private sector improvement policy. We will shortly be announcing the results of the review.

Sheep

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied with the present state of the sheep industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The Welsh sheep industry continues to receive substantial benefits from the EC sheepmeat regime.

The provisional figures from the June 1984 census indicate that the Welsh breeding flock has increased by 2·9 per cent. since June 1983.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

India

2. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent events in India.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We mourn the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi. She was a great leader of her country, and a true friend of Britain. We utterly condemn the tiny minority of people in this country who have sought to exploit, and even to rejoice at, this despicable act.

We look forward to maintaining our excellent relations with India under her new Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, and wish him well in his determined efforts to ensure peace and stability throughout India.

South Africa

3. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of diplomatic relations with the Republic of South Africa.

12. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's relations with South Africa.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We have full diplomatic relations with South Africa. These are necessary to protect our major interests there and to make known to the South African authorities our views on matters of concern to us.

44. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he intends to break off relations with the South African Government in the foreseeable future.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No.

Latin American Debts

10. **Mr. Lofthouse** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role he expects Her Majesty's Government to play in resolving the Latin American debt crisis.

Mr. Rifkind: We will continue to work constructively with other Governments, international institutions and banks to tackle the problem of Latin American debt. The soundest way to create conditions for renewed growth, and thereby to ease the debt problem, is to build on the strategy developed so far.

British Consulate, Durban (UDF Members)

11. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the denial of family and legal access to the three members of the UDF in the British consulate in Durban.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: On a number of occasions they or those visiting them indulged in political activity, and thus

abused our consular premises. In the absence of any assurance that this would cease we had no choice but to withdraw permission for visitors, except for doctors where necessary.

Central America

13. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek an early meeting with the United States Secretary of State to discuss central America.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We are in constant touch with the United States Government at many levels on matters of current concern including central America.

British Embassies and Consulates

14. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to make changes in the establishments of British embassies and consulates overseas.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The number and size of British embassies and consulates overseas are now being reviewed in the light of the outcome of the public expenditure survey.

Arms Control

15. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new initiatives on arms control are being proposed by his Department.

Mr. Luce: The British Government remain strongly committed to the pursuit of arms control agreements. In close consultation with our allies, we have tabled ourselves, or been fully associated with, positive proposals in all the disarmament fora. There has been a disappointing lack of progress, but we shall continue to work vigorously with our allies to persuade the Soviet Union of our mutual interest in balanced reductions in levels of forces and arms expenditure.

South African Citizens (Trial)

16. **Mr. Anderson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what have been the effects on bilateral relations with the South African Government of their non-compliance with the pledge given to the court in Coventry by four South African citizens.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: A serious disagreement of this nature must inevitably affect bilateral relations. The South African Government are in no doubt about our views on this matter, which were made clear to this House by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) in his statement on 23 October.

Middle East

17. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of his recent visit to Israel.

27. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Israel.

32. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on his visit to Israel.

39. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement concerning his recent visit to Israel.

41. **Mr. Neil Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about his visit to Israel.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I refer my hon. Friends and the hon. and learned Member to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris).

33. **Mr. Ottaway** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to the Lebanon.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: During my visit to Lebanon on 28 October I had useful discussions with President Gemayel and Prime Minister Karame. I expressed our support for the Lebanese Government's efforts to restore their authority and to promote national reconciliation and for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon.

34. **Mr. Walters** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards peace in the middle east following his recent visits to the area.

47. **Mr. Heffer** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the recent visit to the Lebanon and Israel; and what steps are required to bring peace to the area.

Mr. Luce: My right hon. and learned Friend's talks in Lebanon and Israel convinced him of the urgency and importance of early progress towards a solution of the Arab-Israel dispute. He made clear, both to the Governments concerned and to the Palestinians he met, our view that a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israel dispute must be based on the two principles of secure existence for Israel and self-determination for the Palestinians. With our European partners we remain ready to contribute to peaceful solutions to these conflicts and that in the Gulf. But the primary responsibility to initiate progress lies with the parties directly concerned. My right hon. and learned Friend was encouraged to find the Governments of Lebanon and Israel committed to the success of the military talks, which began on 8 November, to discuss arrangements for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon.

Namibia

18. **Mr. Gareth Wardell** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom policy regarding Namibia.

Mr. Rifkind: We welcome the continuing contacts between the Governments of South Africa, Angola and the United States. We have been particularly encouraged to learn that the three Governments are currently discussing new proposals. We hope that these will lead to early completion of South African disengagement from Southern Angola and to the Implementation of Security Council resolution (SCR) 435.

South Georgia

19. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his proposals to withdraw responsibility for South Georgia from the Falkland Islands Government.

Mr. Renton: We intend to promulgate a new Constitution for the Falkland Islands next year. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear to the House, South Georgia (and the South Sandwich Islands) are a separate Dependent Territory. They have been administered from Port Stanley purely as a matter of convenience; future constitutional and administrative arrangements for them are under consideration.

Chile

21. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on future relations with the Government of Chile.

Mr. Renton: We are seriously concerned at recent developments in Chile. The basic aim must be to encourage a return to political dialogue and democracy.

Afghanistan

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment his Department has made of events in Afghanistan.

Mr. Renton: Tomorrow in the United Nations General Assembly we and the vast majority of the international community will again condemn the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan. The situation within that tragic country is grim. Afghan civilians continue to be subject to indiscriminate and savage attacks. But strong and spontaneous resistance to the Soviet military occupation continues throughout the country, and shows no sign of succumbing to brute force.

Zimbabwe

22. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to seek to visit Zimbabwe.

Mr. Rifkind: My right hcn. and learned Friend has no immediate plans to do so.

Gibraltar (Spanish Citizens)

23. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding an arrangement with the Spanish Government and Her Majesty's Government that Spanish nationals are to have the right to work and live in the dependent territory of Gibraltar.

Mr. Renton: No such arrangement has been concluded Spanish nationals will be entitled to full rights under the EC treaty throughout the Community, including Gibraltar, on Spain's accession, subject to any transitional periods and derogations to be agreed between the Community and Spain. Spanish nationals may currently both live and work in Gibraltar, subject to the requirements of Gibraltar's legislation.

Falkland Islands

24. **Mr. Speed** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the possibility of resuming talks with Argentina about the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Renton: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 31 October, we remain ready to work for more normal bilateral relations with Argentina. We are not prepared to discuss sovereignty, and hope that the Argentine Government will not continue to insist on linking discussion of normalisation with discussion of sovereignty in the way which caused deadlock at Berne in July.

Ethiopia

25. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any discussions have taken place between Her Majesty's Government and the Ethiopian Government about the difficulties faced by relief agencies operating in areas of Ethiopia affected by internal civil war.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes. We have expressed our concern to the Ethopian Government over the difficulties which the fighting in Ethiopia poses for relief agencies, most recently when my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development met Mr. Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, the Commissioner for Relief and Rehabilitation, on 7 November.

Soviet Foreign Minister

26. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the Soviet Foreign Minister.

Mr. Rifkind: Mr. Gromyko has accepted the invitation to visit this country in 1985 which my right hon. and learned Friend extended during his visit to Moscow in July. The question of dates is under discussion on diplomatic channels.

Intermediate Range Nuclear Weapons

28. **Mr. Bill Walker** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the likelihood of a resumption in the Geneva negotiations on intermediate range nuclear weapons.

Mr. Luce: We believe that President Reagan's confirmation of his full commitment to the pursuit of arms control provides the Soviet Union with a further opportunity to resume negotiations on limiting INF missiles. The United States, with the support of its allies, remains ready to do so without any preconditions, and we urge the Soviet Union to respond positively.

El Salvador

29. **Mr. Moynihan** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the implications for United Kingdom policy towards El Salvador of President Duarte's peace initiatives.

Mr. Renton: We welcome President Duarte's initiative, which is in line with his commitment to work for national reconciliation, to strengthen democracy and end human rights abuse in El Salvador. To demonstrate our support for these policies we have offered to resume a modest technical assistance programme and have made available £100,000 for emergency civilian supplies under our aid programme.

Poland

30. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Poland.

Mr. Rifkind: Following the recent amnesty in Poland and the release of virtually all the political detainees, the Government concluded that the time was now right to resume contacts with the Polish Government at Ministerial level. I therefore visited Poland from 3 to 7 November.

The visit was useful and successful. My aim was to gain a first-hand impression of the situation, to have contact with a broad range of Polish opinion and to put across British views and concerns. The visit achieved all three objectives.

I held talks with my host, the Polish Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, on bilateral issues and international topics of mutual concern. I also called on the Polish First Deputy Prime Minister, a Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Trade, the Chairman of the Polish Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee and the Deputy Minister for Economic Reform.

I was able to meet several Solidarity representatives as well as a representative of the Catholic Church.

There have been some positive developments in Poland. I was impressed by the degree of public expression and public debate which I encountered. It would, however, be unrealistic to suggest that a wide gap between the Government and the people does not still exist. I emphasised these points in my official and other discussions. I was also able to raise human rights aspects and to convey to my hosts the widespread concern in parliamentary and public circles in the United Kingdom at the continued detention of political prisoners including Bogdan Lis and Piotr Mierzejewski.

Our aim now is to work for a more normal bilateral relationship and to give our support to the much needed process of reconciliation in Poland. In our further exchanges with the Poles we shall reserve the right to continue to emphasise our concerns wherever appropriate.

Hong Kong

31. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when and by whom the draft agreement on Hong Kong will be signed.

Mr. Luce: The House will have an opportunity to debate the draft agreement at the beginning of December, and will wish to take into account the reports of the assessment office in Hong Kong and the independent monitoring team. If the agreement is acceptable to Parliament, it will be signed in Peking before the end of the year. Arrangements for the signature have not yet been finalised, but will be announced in due course.

45. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to introduce legislation similar to that which applies in Britain to rehabilitate those found guilty of minor crimes in Hong Kong.

Mr. Luce: This is a matter for the Hong Kong Government, who intend to issue by the end of 1984 a consultative paper for public discussion relating to the introduction of a possible "spent conviction" scheme in Hong Kong.

Nigeria

35. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to receive the new high commissioner from Nigeria.

Mr. Rifkind: We hope that it may be soon. The appointment of a new high commissioner from Nigeria would be an important and welcome step in restoring the traditional closeness of our bilateral relations.

Western European Union

36. **Mr. Hill** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with the other Foreign Ministers of the Western European Union.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have nothing to add to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) on 12 November to my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Murphy).

46. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any reservations in regard to the current proposals for reactivation of the Western European Union or in regard to the suggested establishment of a European Defence Community.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have no reservations in regard to the decision to make better use of Western European Union, and I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Murphy) on 12 November by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton).

I am not aware of any proposals for a European Defence Community.

Outer Space (Arms Control)

37. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise with the Soviet Foreign Secretary when he next meets him the question of the militarisation of outer space and the issues which prevent agreement.

Mr. Luce: My right hon. and learned Friend will continue to urge the Russians to respond positively and soon to the Americans' stated readiness to discuss all aspects of outer space arms control.

USSR (Jewish Emigrants)

38. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received any response from the Soviet authorities to representations he made earlier in the current year regarding individual cases of Soviet Jews who have been repeatedly refused permission to emigrate.

Mr. Rifkind: My right hon. and learned Friend has raised the question of human rights in the Soviet Union with Mr. Gromyko on three separate occasions this year and has specifically mentioned his concern at the plight of Soviet Jewry. Regrettably, there has been no response to these and to many other representations made to the Soviet Union about its failure to honour its obligations in the human rights field.

Soviet Union (Visas)

40. **Sir Peter Blaker** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the average annual number of Soviet citizens granted visas to visit the United Kingdom during the last 15 years; what is the average duration of such visas; and how these figures compare with the number of visas granted to United Kingdom citizens visiting the Soviet Union.

Mr. Rifkind: The annual numbers of Soviet citizens admitted to this country from 1970 to 1983 are as follows:

	Numbers
1970	5,889
1971	5,480
1972	4,717
1973	6,272
1974	7,401
1975	8,443
1976	9,397
1977	10,472
1978	11,294
1979	10,379
1980	8,674
1981	10,056
1982	10,371
1983	7,558

Nearly all these were short visits of 30 days or fewer. British citizens are not required to notify United Kingdom authorities of their intention to travel to the Soviet Union or to any other country. We therefore have no information of Soviet entry visas granted to British citizens.

Rev. Martin Smyth asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will seek a further opportunity to raise with the Soviet Foreign Minister the cases of Ida Nudel and Vladimir Slepak and others who have been waiting for many years for exit visas to join family and friends outside the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Rifkind: My right hon. and learned Friend has raised the question of human rights with Mr. Gromyko on each occasion he has had talks with him. We will continue to remind the Soviet authorities of their human rights commitments at every suitable opportunity. The cases of Ida Nudel and Vladimir Slepak are well known to us. Mrs. Nudel's case has been raised with the Soviet Union at ministerial level on several occasions.

Israel (North Sea Oil)

42. **Mr. Hoyle** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, following his visit to Israel and his discussions there, he will ensure the lifting of restrictions on the sale of North sea oil to Israel and reconsider the policy of continuing the authentication of negative certificate of origin as required by those companies complying with the Arab trade boycott.

Mr. Luce: My right hon. and learned Friend made it clear during his visit to Israel that we have no plans to revise our guidance to companies exporting North sea crude oil. He also reiterated our opposition to the Arab boycott. Our policy is to encourage trade with both Israel and the Arab states, and I am glad to note that our trade with Israel is increasing. The long-standing procedures of Foreign and Commonwealth Office authentication of signatures on certificates of origin does not imply approval of the contents of the documents in question.

USSR

43. **Mr. Soames** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Anglo-Soviet relations.

Mr. Rifkind: Our policy is to seek to improve United Kingdom-Soviet relations and to broaden East-West understanding. To this end we are increasing the frequency and variety of our contacts with the Soviet Union.

My right hon. and learned Friend's visit to Moscow in July and the expected return visit of Mr. Gromyko next year are part of this process. The coming visit, at the invitation of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, by a delegation from the Supreme Soviet led by Mr. Gorbachev will also offer a valuable opportunity for an exchange of views at a high level.

Egyptian Citizens

48. **Mr. John Hunt** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is satisfied with the standards of courtesy extended by his consulate officials in Cairo to Egyptians wishing to visit the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I have no reason to doubt their courtesy.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Couchman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 12-13 November.

Mr. Rifkind: A special Foreign Affairs Council on enlargement was held on 12-13 November to help prepare the Community's position for the negotiating conferences to be held with Spain and Portugal on 26-27 November. Discussion concentrated on Spanish and Portuguese fisheries and agriculture. The Council also made progress in discussion of the outstanding issues in the renegotiations of the Lomé convention. Ministers will meet again on 20 November.

Council endorsed the text on budget discipline on which a common position had been reached at the ECOFIN council. The text incorporates the measures necessary to guarantee the effective application of the principles agreed by Heads of Government. It will be discussed with the European Parliament later this month prior to its formal adoption by the Council.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Life Sentences

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of offenders given life sentences in 1982 and 1983, respectively, had committed homicide offences.

Mr. Mellor: Two hundred and fifty persons, including young offenders, were given life sentences in 1982 and 169 in 1983; the proportion of these sentences which were for homicide offences was 84 per cent. in 1982 and 82 per cent. in 1983.

Boys on Remand (Adult Penal Establishments)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the ages, location and length of time held of those 14 to 16-year-old boys on remand in adult penal establishments to the latest available date.

Mr. Mellor: The available information about 15 and 16-year-old boys is given in the following table; no 14-year-old boys were so held on 31 August 1984.

It is normal for young males to be kept apart from adult males.

Untried and convicted unsentenced males aged 15 and 16 held in adult prisons in England and Wales on 31 August 1984: by establishment, age and time since first received into custody

Number

	*Time since first received into custody**									
	Up to 1 month		*Over 1 month up to 2 months*		*Over 2 months up to 3 months*		*Over 3 months up to 6 months*		*Total*	
	15	*16*	*15*	*16*	*15*	*16*	*15*	*16*	*15*	*16*
Adult prisons with remand units/wings for prisoners aged under 21										
Exeter	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Manchester	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	3
Remand centres taking remand prisoners of all ages										
Ashford	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	1	1
Low Newton	5	9	—	—	—	2	—	2	5	13
Manchester	2	1	—	3	—	1	—	—	2	5
Pucklechurch	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Risley	5	7	—	2	—	—	—	1	5	10
Other adult prisons										
Bedford	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Leeds	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Lincoln	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1

*Including any time which may have been spent on bail after a first remand in custody.

Drugs Convention (Council of Europe)

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration the Government are giving to the proposed international drugs convention under the auspices of the Council of Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: International co-operation is an essential component of the Government's strategy for combating drug misuse. We therefore welcome the attention which this topic is receiving in the Council of Europe, both in the Parliamentary Assembly and in the Pompidou Group—the Council of Europe co-operation group to combat drug abuse and illicit trafficking in drugs. The United Kingdom now chairs the Pompidou Group, and we regard that body as the principal forum for developing co-operation in western Europe, whether through formal legal instruments —which have not been put forward in the Assembly or in the Pompidou Group—or in less formal ways.

North Cornwall (Swimmers)

Mr. Lilley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many rescues of swimmers in difficulty were performed off the beaches of north Cornwall and reported to the authorities during the most recent year for which information is available.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Such information is not collected centrally. However, my hon. Friend may be interested in a recent article on beach safety which contains some relevant information; it is in issue No. 67—summer 1984—of "Water Safety Today" which is published by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. A copy of this publication has been placed in the Library of the House.

Court Cases

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time currently elapsing before a case is brought to court; and if he will make a statement about the effect of recent changes on the periods concerned.

Mr. Mellor: Information about waiting times in the magistrates' courts is not at present collected centrally, though we have recently completed a pilot study with a view to introducing a national collection scheme.

Information supplied by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor about the period from committal to commencement of trial in the Crown court is set out in the table. As the table shows, average waiting times in the Crown court have decreased significantly from the final quarter of 1979 to the third quarter of this year, despite an increase in the number of committals for trial in the Crown court by nearly a half in four years. This improvement reflects increases in resources, including the provision of additional court accommodation, the appointment of additional judges, and improvements in efficiency, in line with our general emphasis on making the best use of resources in both higher and lower courts.

Average waiting times in weeks from committal for trial to trial in the Crown Court

	Overall	*Custody*	*Bail*
England and Wales			
Final Quarter 1979	17·9	11·8	19·5
Third Quarter 1984	13·9	10·0	15·0
England and Wales, excluding London			
Final Quarter 1979	14·9	10·0	16·1
Third Quarter 1984	11·7	8·7	12·7
London			
Final Quarter 1979	31·4	21·3	33·6
Third Quarter 1984	23·0	17·1	24·5

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of the 31 cases of alleged assault on working miners in Derbyshire up to mid-September have been tried to date;

(2) how many of the 153 cases involving alleged threats against working miners and their families in Derbyshire up to mid-September have been tried to date;

(3) how many of the 278 cases in Derbyshire involving alleged damage to the homes and vehicles of working miners up to mid-September have been tried to date.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Immigration Act Prisoners (Transfer)

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why on 5 July three Immigration Act prisoners were transferred to Her Majesty's prison Pentonville at short notice without any explanation.

Mr. Mellor: The three men were transferred from Ashford to Pentonville on 5 July for operational reasons. My noble Friend the Minister of State will write to the hon. Member giving further details.

Holloway Prison

Ms. Richardson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the staff employed at C1 psychiatric wing, Her Majesty's prison, Holloway, are registered mental nurses, state registered nurses and state enrolled nurses; and whether any of the staff are unqualified.

Mr. Mellor: Of the nursing staff normally employed in C1 wing, four are state enrolled nurses and 10 are state registered nurses. Five of the latter are also registered mental nurses. In addition, there are two auxiliary nurses without formal nursing qualifications.

Immigration

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals wishing to come to the United Kingdom from the Indian sub-continent as fiancés or fiancées or spouses of United Kingdom citizens are currently waiting an appointment for interview by an entry clearance officer.

Mr. Waddington: The information requested on husbands and male fiancés is pubished quarterly in the Home Office statistical bulletin "Control of Immigration: Statistics"—footnote 2 of table 10 of issue 19/84 for the second quarter of 1984. At the end of June 1984, 3,400 wives—including those whose husbands are not British citizens—were awaiting their first interview; female financées do not need to obtain entry clearance.

Mentally-sick Persons (Police Guidelines)

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish any guidelines *(a)* he has issued and *(b)* the Metropolitan police have issued concerning police treatment of cases involving mental illness and whether any inter-disciplinary guidelines have been arrived at by either both the above or the local police affecting Leyton.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Guidance to the police on the treatment of mentally disordered persons is contained in section 4 of the "Consolidated Circular to the Police on Crime and Kindred Matters", and Home Office circular 69/1983, copies of which are in the Library of the House. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that his force general orders reflect this guidance. No guidance on this subject has been issued by this Department or the commissioner addressed to agencies other than the police, but I understand that some guidelines on compulsory admissions procedure drawn up by the Waltham Forest district health authority were agreed by the Metropolitan police in December 1982.

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when it is intended to replace the police national computer with new hardware.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The PNC mainframe hardware will have completed 10 years of continous service by 1988, but final decisions have not yet been taken as to when and how best to replace it.

Television Reception

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the 90,000 people in the United Kingdom presently without a usable UHF television service are in Scotland; and whether he will now require the broadcasting authorities to provide UHF coverage to all communities consisting of 100 people or more.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The BBC and IBA estimate that between 30,000 and 50,000 people in Scotland are without a usable UHF television service. The third phase of the joint BBC/IBA engineering programme aims to extend UHF coverage to all unserved areas with a population of less than 500, wherever this is practicable. Although no

lower limit is specified, the cost of providing a service for communities of fewer than 200 is in practice likely to prove prohibitive.

Kerb Crawlers

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women have been attacked by kerb crawlers in Liverpool in each of the past five years.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not available from records collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the problem of kerb crawling in the inner city of Liverpool, details of which has been sent to him by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside;

(2) what recent representations he has received concerning kerb crawling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend has asked for a report from the chief constable of Merseyside about the problem of kerb crawling in Liverpool, and will be replying to the hon. Member's letter of 6 November when he has received this report.

We are aware that kerb crawling constitutes a serious problem in many areas, including the hon. Member's constituency. In August this year, the Criminal Law Revision Committee published a report entitled "Prostitution in the Street" in which it recommended the creation of an offence to cover the nuisance of kerb crawling and two other offenses involving the soliciting of women by men. We welcome the committee's recommendations and, although there will be no early opportunity to give effect to them in Government legislation, we would support a Bill introduced by a private Member for that purpose.

Since the report was published, we have received representations from six hon. Members, five interested bodies and six members of the public, most but not all of whom supported the committee's recommendations.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for reports from each appropriate chief constable as to their use of manpower to deal with the problems of kerb crawling in inner city areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. The deployment of police officers to deal with kerb crawling is an operational matter for each chief officer of police to determine in the light of the prevalence of the problem in an area and the other demands on his resources.

Prison Statistics

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department in the last six months for which figures are available, how many people have served sentences in Her Majesty's prison Leeds for: *(a)* non-payment of fines and *(b)* how many of those serving sentences for non-payment of fines committed offences for which the court was unable to impose a custodial sentence.

Mr. Mellor: According to the records held centrally, about 1,200 persons were initially received into Leeds prison in the first six months of 1984 on committal in default of payment of a fine. The offences of these persons are not recorded in sufficient detail to make it possible to identify those who had been convicted of an offence for which a custodial sentence cannot be imposed.

Probation Officers

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many probation officers were in post in West Yorkshire on 31 March 1983, and 31 March 1984.

Mr. Mellor: Two hundred and eighty-five and 286, respectively, including those seconded to prison department establishments.

Housing Laws (Guernsey)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what responsibilities he has in relation to the housing laws in operation in Guernsey; and if he will make a statement of Government policy in this area.

Mr. Giles Shaw: None, unless the housing laws raise issues relevant to our international obligations.

Channel Islands

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on the request made to the Channel Islands for an annual contribution to the costs of defence and international representation.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand that committees of the states in both Jersey and Guernsey are considering my right hon. and learned Friend's request.

R v Mr. Gillow (Costs)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the case of R v Mr. Gillow to be heard at the European Court of Justice; what he estimates will be the costs of the case; and whether he has asked the Government of Guernsey to pay the costs of the case.

Mr. Giles Shaw: A case has been brought before the European Commission of Human Rights by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Gillow, but it is not clear at this stage whether or not the case will be referred to the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg. Guernsey is aware of the cost implications for it; but estimates are not yet possible.

Dr. Alan Clift

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the forensic experts who supplied evidence to the Home Office Retirement board which considered the case of Dr. Clift, indicating which were supportive and which critical of his overall professional integrity and which were independent of the Home Office.

Mr. Brittan: Evidence was supplied Dr. A. S. Curry, Professor S. S. Kind, Mr. N. B. Prance, Miss M. Pereira and Dr. B. Rees, who were at that time members of the Home Office forensic science service, and by Dr. B. B. Beeson, Dr. J. G. Renstead, Mr. L. Cann, Dr. J. A. G. Clarke, Dr. G. Garrett, Dr. D. Patterson, Dr. C. St. Hill, Mr. A. Thompson, Dr. L. Wise, Dr. R.C. Woodcock, and Mr. H. J. Yallop, who were not. The proceedings of a departmental retirement board are held in private and it

would not be appropriate to publish or indicate the nature of material prepared for the proceedings relating to an individual member of staff.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the original report prepared by Dr. Clift about forensic aspects of the alleged murder of Helen Wills by John Preece.

Mr. Brittan: I am placing in the Library a copy of the text of a report by Dr. Clift dated 8 February 1973, which I assume to be the report to which the right hon. Member is referring.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) prior to his suspension, if Dr. Clift was given any informal warnings, formal warnings, adverse reports, or chances to improve any alleged deficiences in his performance;

(2) if he will outline the procedure that is followed before an employee of his Department of the grade of Dr. Clift can be compulsorily retired; and whether it was followed in the case of Dr. Clift.

Mr. Brittan: The general principles governing the procedures for the compulsory retirement of non-industrial civil servants are set out in paragraphs 10510-10609 of the "Civil Service Pay and Conditions of Service Code", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. These envisage that, where an officer's performance deteriorates, there will be a series of reports, informal and formal warnings, and opportunities to improve performance. These procedures could not be followed in Dr. Clift's case because once it became clear that his work did not reach an acceptable standard of professional competence, he could not be allowed to continue as an expert witness. The Civil Service Appeal Board condidered the procedures which had been followed in Dr. Clift's case and decided that he had not been unfairly dismissed.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the reports and documents asked for by Dr. Clift and his solicitor which his Department refused to make available, indicating in each case why the request was refused.

Mr. Brittan: It is not possible to provide a complete list of the documents which were not made available to Dr. Clift and his solicitors as the requests were, in some cases, made in general terms. It would appear, however, that the principal documents which my Department declined to make available were the complete report of the police investigation into Dr. Clift's work; the statements by Home Office staff in the trial of Messrs. Morgan, Brown and Cowley; and the annual staff reports on Dr. Clift for the period 1972 to 1974. These were refused because they were not relevant to the issues which were being considered by the departmental retirement board. My Department did, however, make available all documents and records which related to the issues the board considered, including relevant extracts of the report of the police investigation, and the annual staff reports on Dr. Clift for the period 1975 to 1977.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many annual reports were made about Dr. Clift during his years as a Home Office forensic pathologist; in which years his work was criticised; and if he was informed of the criticism.

Mr. Brittan: Twenty-three staff reports were made on Dr. Clift — normally at annual intervals — during his service with the Home Office. These reports were confidential, and it is not the practice to publish details of them.

Intimidation

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is satisfied with the adequacy of the law to prevent intimidation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The adequacy of the law in this respect is being considered in the context of the review of the Public Order Act 1936 and related legislation.

Isle of Man and Channel Islands

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost of maintaining his Department's dealings with the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands; and whether the islands make any contribution to these costs.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The cost of the section dealing with islands' matters in 1983-84 was £244,500 including overheads and common services. These costs are met by the United Kingdom Government except to the extent that they include the Home Office role in the discharge of the Government's responsibility for the islands' defence and external relations, to which a contribution is made by the Isle of Man.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will explain the procedure through which the United Kingdom exercises its responsibilities toward the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man in cases of foreign and international representation.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The United Kingdom Government are responsible for the islands' international relations. The relevant United Kingdom Government Departments represent the islands' interests in international negotiations and the islands' authorities are advised and consulted, through the Home Office, as necessary. In addition, the facilities of United Kingdom posts abroad are available to British citizens from the islands.

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what representations have been made to him by the Trades Union Congress on unemployment;

(2) what plans he has for reducing unemployment.

Mr. Alan Clark: We have received no recent specific representations from the Trades Union Congress on the question of unemployment.

Some 689,000 people are benefiting from our employment and training measures designed to alleviate the impact of unemployment on those most affected. However, sustainable employment depends on a healthy economy and competitive industry. Our policies are directed to this end, and we continue to look for ways of building on what has been achieved so far. One important influence on firms' competitiveness is the level of wages,

and the Government believes that moderating the growth in real earnings will have a significant impact on unemployment.

Wages Councils

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement of his policy on the future of wages councils.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Government have as yet made no decision on the future of the wages councils. It is carefully considering all available evidence and opinion on their operation and effects.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list the level of unemployment in the *Official Report* in the city of Manchester on *(a)* a constituency level and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date;

(2) if he will list the percentage of unemployment in the constituencies within the Merseyside special development area on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date for which figures are available;

(3) if he will list the level of unemployment in each London borough on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will list the level of unemployment in the city of Liverpool on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* on a ward basis at the latest date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Unemployment totals for parliamentary constituencies and local authority districts are now available in the House of Commons Library. Unemployment rates are available only for travel-to-work areas and for counties. The new system to compile figures by electoral wards is not fully developed, and unemployment data for individual wards will be made available from about the middle of next year.

Labour Mobility

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Employment what assistance his Department provides to people moving from one part of the country to another for the purpose of taking up employment; whether he proposes any changes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Manpower Services Commission provides financial assistance under the employment transfer scheme to help and encourage unemployed people to move home permanently to take up employment. The main aim of the scheme is to help to fill vacancies which employers have tried and failed to fill with suitable local unemployed people.

A review of the scheme has recently been undertaken by officials of the Manpower Services Commission and the Department of Employment. This has led to proposals to improve the scheme's cost-effectiveness and simplify its rules which are currently being considered by the commission.

Disabled People

Mr. Robert Atkins asked the Secretary of State for Employment when the Manpower Services Commission's code of good practice on the employment of disabled people will be issued; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Manpower Services Commission's "Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Disabled People" is being published today and is being formally launched at a reception for winners of the fit for work awards scheme, at which the Prime Minister is guest of honour. Copies of the code have been placed in the Library.

The code was prepared by the commission in response to a request in July 1982 by the Government for a code of good practice in the employment of disabled people for use on a voluntary basis. It has been prepared in consultation with a wide range of interested organisations including those representing employers, trade unions and the interests of disabled people. In its final form it has been unanimously approved by the Commission and endorsed by the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Disabled People, which advises both the commission and the Secretary of State for Employment. We also welcome the endorsement of the TUC and CBI.

The code sets out for the first time in a comprehensive form standards which employers should adopt in employing disabled people and provides practical advice and information to help them meet those standards. It also recognises the role others, notably employees and their representatives, have to play, and there is a special section addressed to them.

The Government welcome and endorse the code. We believe that it represents an important and practical tool for ensuring that the abilities of disabled people are more fully recognised and their potential at work properly fulfilled. I hope that Members on both sides of the House will give their full support to the code and that the guidance it gives will be widely adopted.

ENERGY

Intellectual Property Rights

Mr. Eggar asked the Secretary of State for Energy what steps have been taken to manage the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's intellectual property rights under the European fast reactor collaboration.

Mr. Peter Walker: On 9 October the UK Atomic Energy Authority and the National Nuclear Corporation formed a company, Fast Reactor Technology Limited (FASTEC), to manage the commercial use of the technology generated by them in relation to the research, design and development of fast reactors under the European collaboration. The NNC holds 51 per cent. of the authorised share capital and the UKAEA holds 49 per cent.

NATIONAL FINANCE

European Community Budget

73. **Mr. Maxton** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is satisfied that all possible savings have been made in the 1984 Community budget.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Yes.

Value Added Tax (Deregistration)

Mr. Neil Hamilton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many registered traders applied for deregistration for value added tax purposes in each quarter in 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Hayhoe: only the number of actual deregistrations from VAT is centrally recorded. The figures are as follows:

From 20 October 1983 to 2 February 1983—36,741 deregistrations.
From 3 February 1983 to 23 May 1983—40,767 deregistrations.
From 24 May 1983 to 19 July 1983—35,114 deregistrations.
From 20 July 1983 to 12 October 1983—37,380 deregistrations.
From 13 October 1983 to 3 January 1984—33,928 deregistrations.
From 4 January 1984 to 2 April 1984—42,913 deregistrations.
From 3 April 1984 to 3 July 1984—36,502 deregistrations.
From 4 July 1984 to 2 October 1984—37,314 deregistrations.

Books (VAT)

Mr. Terry Fields asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to introduce value added tax on books; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 30 October to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) at column 944.

Interest Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the real interest rate, being the minimum lending rate less inflation, prevailing in October 1975, October 1978, October 1980, October 1981, October 1982, October 1983, and October 1984.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Information on the minimum lending rate is to be found on page 192 of the annual supplement to *Economic Trends* and information on prices on pages 114-117 of the same publication, although the hon. Member should be aware that from 20 August 1981 the Bank of England suspended the announcement of minimum lending rate. An article in the December 1983 Bank of England *Quarterly Bulletin* discusses some of the problems involved in measuring real rates of interest and shows recent trends.

Capital Gains Tax Retirement Relief

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost of extending capital gains tax retirement relief to self-employed people who have to cease work on account of illness or disability if the criterion used was *(a)* receipt of invalidity benefit or *(b)* receipt of attendance allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lawson: I regret that the information necessary to provide a reliable estimate of the cost of extending capital gains tax retirement relief in the ways suggested is not available.

Unemployment (Cost)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out in tabular form his best estimate of the average monthly cost to the Exchequer when an adult male worker on average weekly earnings, on the basis of all industries and services covered by the new earnings survey, updated by the average earnings' index and assuming pay was not affected by absence, becomes unemployed, showing separately *(a)* for single men and *(b)* for a married man with two children, one aged under five and the other aged between five and 10, the following disbursements: (i) unemployment benefit, (ii) supplementary benefit, (iii) income tax rebate, (iv) housing benefit and the following losses of revenue, (v) from income tax, (vi) from taxes on consumption of goods and services, (vii) from employer's national insurance contributions and from employee's national insurance contributions.

Mr. Peter Rees: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Oil (Gross Domestic Product Earnings)

Mr. Wilson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will incorporate the gross domestic product earnings from oil produced in the Scottish sector of the North sea as determined under the Continental Shelf Jurisdiction Order 1968 into Scottish gross domestic product figures given in official publications.

Mr. Peter Rees [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 November 1984, column *164*]: It would not be appropriate to allocate the gross domestic product of the North sea to regions of the United Kingdom.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Leeward Islands

49. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is satisfied that the Commission's decision to refuse to finance Leeward Islands Air Transport's purchase of four British Aerospace super748s was taken according to normal EEC procedures.

Mr. Raison: The Commission has not made any final decision on financing the super748s. I understand the airline submitted new evidence to the Commission on 7 November. I am confident that this will be reviewed carefully and the decisions taken in accordance with normal EC procedures.

Ethiopia

50. **Mr. Geoffrey Robinson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a timetable of the official requests received by his Department for aid to the famine in Ethiopia and the responses made by his Department.

Mr. Raison: Two such appeals have been made this year by the Ethiopian Government, but there have been others by international agencies.

On 30 March 1984 the Ethiopian Government appealed to all donors for drought relief aid. The full report reached my Administration on 27 April. The donors had sought detailed clarification on certain points through the United Nations resident co-ordinator and the answers to these were given at a meeting on 4 June. We then supported European Community decisions to provide 18,000 tonnes of cereals (7 June), and 1,900 tonnes of dairy products (10 July).

On 17 April the Community had already decided to provide emergency aid of 2·5 million ecus. On 22 May we told the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner

that, following earlier help, a further £300,000 was being given to various British voluntary agencies to support their relief operation.

In response to the International Committee of the Red Cross and League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' 1984 appeals for drought stricken African countries, including Ethiopia, we had already made grants of £2 million and £1 million respectively. In July and June we received revised appeals from each organisation. On 30 July we announced further contributions to these appeals of £150,000 and £350,000 respectively. the same day we announced allocations of 2,000 tonnes British food aid for the voluntary agencies' work in Ethiopia, and £1 million for the Disasters Emergency Appeal "Famine in Africa". We also indicated that we would urge the World Food Programme to give Ethiopia part of the British contribution to the programme, and 15,000 tonnes have now been so allocated.

On 20 July we received a UNICEF appeal for help to mothers and children in 13 drought-stricken African countries including Ethiopia. We responded to this on 7 August with a gift of £1 million.

On 21 September the Ethiopian authorities issued a second appeal to all donors. On 17 September the European Community had already allotted another 3 million ecus in emergency assistance. On 4 October we agreed to provide another 3,000 tonnes of cereals through British voluntary agencies. On 17 October the Community agreed to provide another 35,000 tonnes of cereals and 1,300 tonnes of edible oil and dairy products. I announced our further aid decisions on 24 October, and at our urging the European Community Council of Ministers agreed on extensive additional help on 6 November.

51. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is satisfied with the action taken by the EEC in providing emergency aid to Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: Yes, so far. The European Community has provided food, development and emergency aid to Ethiopia on a substantial scale this year. The need now is to reach early agreement on the 1985 food aid programme and on further emergency assistance from the European development fund.

52. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about recent discussions with the Ethiopian Government about food aid and other matters.

Mr. Raison: Our ambassador and his staff in Addis Ababa are in constant touch with the Ethiopian authorities. I myself saw the Ethiopian Commissioner for Relief and Rehabilitation, Mr. Dawit Wolde-Giorgis, on 7 November. We then reviewed what Her Majesty's Government, together with the European Community and other countries and agencies, are now doing to help relieve the famine in Ethiopia.

53. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken by the Council of Ministers to help alleviate the consequences of the present famine in Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: The Council of Ministers endorsed on 6 November plans to provide food and other emergency aid worth approximately £35 million for Africa, much of which will go to Ethiopia. Before this £11·6 million had been spent by the European Community on food aid, including 53,000 tonnes of cereals, to Ethiopia in 1984 in addition to development projects financed from the European development fund.

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to seek to secure United Nations observers to station themselves in Ethiopia to ensure that food aid reaches the starving civilian population and is not diverted to other recipients.

Mr. Raison: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made representations to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for better aid co-ordination. Last week he appointed a UN co-ordinator for international relief aid to Ethiopia. The UN agencies concerned, and the voluntary agencies, work closely with the Ethiopian Government in expediting the transport of food to the people who need it. We have said that we are ready to provide further help to reinforce their monitoring work if this is required.

UNESCO

54. **Dame Judith Hart** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will refrain from reaching a final decision on the issue of the United Kingdom's continuing membership of UNESCO until the House has had an opportunity to consider the matter.

Mr. Raison: I have already said that the Government will take into consideration the views expressed by hon. Members in reaching a decision on continued membership of UNESCO. The possible use of parliamentary time for this purpose is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will specify the proportion of the £6·8 million Overseas Development Administration roading contract in the Falkland Islands attributable to *(a)* roads in Port Stanley and the cost per metre of constructing these and *(b)* the road from Port Stanley to the Port Stanley airport; and what proceedings are being contemplated against the contractor, in view of the break-up of this road immediately after its opening.

Mr. Raison: Of the £6·8 million, £3·2 million was spent on Stanley town roads and £2·9 million on the airport road.

The cost per metre for the Stanley roads was £667 inclusive of fixed assets. I am advised that it is unlikely that contractual liability for the damage to the airport road could be shown.

TRANSPORT

Local Authorities (Transport Policies and Programmes)

Mr. Mudd asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report*, for each local authority in England, the following information from their transport policies and programmes submissions: *(a)* expenditure bid for 1984-85, *(b)* accepted expenditure for 1984-85, *(c)* latest forecast of outturn expenditure for

1984-85, and *(d)* expenditure bid for 1985-86 for (i) highway capital expenditure (distinguishing for 1985-86 that part of bid which will be eligible for transport supplementary grant), (ii) public transport capital expenditure, (iii) highway maintenance expenditure, and (iv) public transport revenue support expenditure, showing in each case the total for England as a whole.

Mrs. Chalker: This information is given in the following tables. The breakdown of accepted capital expenditure between highways and public transport is based on the councils' priorities as stated in their 1984-85 transport policies and programmes.

Highways Capital Expenditure

£ million, cash

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	1984-85			1985-86 Bid	
	Bid	Accepted	Forecast Outturn	All Highway	TSG Eligible
GLC	140·853	72·200	104·294	160·635	140·309
GMC	30·084	17·301	17·112	27·566	26·295
Merseyside	19·816	16·146	12·774	15·902	15·568
South Yorkshire	19·591	8·666	15·048	20·486	19·499
Tyne/Wear	15·400	6·700	10·290	17·960	16·800
West Midlands	37·829	21·673	31·716	38·692	38·515
West Yorkshire	28·900	15·334	21·045	27·030	22·535
Total Metropolitans	151·620	85·820	107·985	147·636	139·212
Avon	4·156	3·055	4·034	4·355	4·030
Bedford	5·137	4·539	5·638	6·120	5·837
Berkshire	23·378	11·100	14·189	17·327	14·382
Buckingham	10·534	9·108	6·938	11·777	11·186
Cambridge	8·517	6·747	7·858	8·961	6·838
Cheshire	7·621	6·066	6·611	9·250	8·200
Cleveland	12·648	9·080	9·463	11·416	11·416
Cornwall	7·858	7·508	7·508	7·730	6·030
Cumbria	6·473	4·000	4·476	7·821	7·632
Derbyshire	7·660	5·758	9·023	13·355	12·605
Devon	11·631	9·540	10·707	14·432	10·973
Dorset	14·200	13·127	13·657	16·932	16·577
Durham	8·081	6·712	6·677	7·195	6·753
East Sussex	9·904	5·606	9·228	10·251	7·810
Essex	20·160	14·455	15·078	18·305	14·132
Gloucester	6·563	4·606	6·623	6·991	5·598
Hampshire	18·615	15·760	16·000	19·260	19·091
Hereford/Worcester	9·252	8·493	6·174	8·784	7·173
Hertford	10.150	9·655	8·360	12·420	11·810
Humberside	12·316	11·691	11·342	11·895	11·388
Isle of Wight	3·455	2·116	2·454	3·265	3·007
Kent	19·562	16·307	16·354	23·587	21·829
Lancashire	24·168	16·040	15·657	24·428	22·831
Leicester	15·035	13·413	13·959	19·100	18·401
Lincoln	5·820	5·726	6·041	5·325	4·084
Norfolk	8·338	7·864	3·880	5·991	5·319
Northampton	19·220	11·785	11·670	21·125	20·650
Northumbria	3·834	3·789	2·736	3·530	3·122
North Yorkshire	9·895	7·304	7·443	13·317	10·126
Nottingham	12·617	9·450	9·602	12·432	10·296
Oxford	7·759	5·164	7·006	5·894	2·841
Shropshire	5·599	4·355	5·100	4·352	3·922
Somerset	7·166	6·024	6·067	7·135	5·925
Stafford	13·120	8·690	8·662	14·100	12·880
Suffolk	10·009	8·334	6·031	10·028	8·341
Surrey	9·349	9·349	8·684	9·427	8·017
Warwick	1·839	1·839	2·828	5·074	3·829
West Sussex	9·570	8·500	9·261	10·178	9·737
Wiltshire	8·718	6·657	8·848	10·298	4·054
Total Shires	409·927	319·312	331·867	433·163	378·672
England	702·400	477·332	544·146	741·434	658·193

Notes:

Columns (1)-(4) Includes capital expenditure on highway construction and improvement, traffic regulation, the provision of parking places, and vehicles, plant machinery and depots for road maintenance.

Column (5) Is capital expenditure on highways and the regulation of traffic only.

Public transport capital expenditure

£ million cash

	Bid	*1984-85 Accepted*	*Forecast outturn*	*1985-86 Bid*
GLC	186·648	142·800	—	—
GMC	11·578	5·245	8·358	14·661
Merseyside	24·740	7·550	6·670	6·968
South Yorkshire	2,215	0·000	0·337	0·290
Tyne/Wear	1·680	1·400	0·850	1·910
West Midlands	10·121	4·727	8·425	11·353
West Yorkshire	2·887	2·887	2·371	3·476
Total Metropolitans	53·221	21·809	27·011	38·658
Avon	0·158	0·085	0·086	0·115
Bedford	0·037	0·000	0·035	0·011
Berkshire	0·000	0·000	0·35	0·528
Buckingham	1·326	0·000	0·000	0·000
Cambridge	·579	·438	·403	·289
Cheshire	·674	·394	·424	·410
Cleveland	·454	·454	·624	·196
Cornwall	0·000	0·000	0·000	0·000
Cumbria	·074	0·000	0·000	0·78
Derbyshire	·465	·465	·198	0·000
Devon	·958	·922	1·505	·216
Dorset	·300	·300	·251	·368
Durham	·591	0·000	·180	·481
East Sussex	·022	0·000	·022	·139
Essex	·088	·045	·031	·050
Gloucester	·095	·095	·013	·029
Hampshire	·435	·435	·423	·235
Hereford/Worcester	·138	0·000	·033	·080
Hertford	·200	·200	·015	·240
Humberside	·212	·025	·456	·547
Isle of Wight	·165	0·000	0·000	·182
Kent	·052	·052	·052	·157
Lancashire	·675	·010	·744	1·450
Leicester	·625	0·000	·230	0·000
Lincoln	·213	·213	·217	·160
Norfolk	·071	0·000	·031	·214
Northampton	·015	0·000	0·000	0·000
Northumberland	·055	0·000	·001	·057
North Yorkshire	·396	·396	·390	·343
Nottingham	·790	0·000	·016	0·000
Oxford	·379	·262	·017	0·000
Shropshire	·045	·045	0·000	0·000
Somerset	0·000	0·000	0·000	0·000
Stafford	·280	·010	·030	·252
Suffolk	0·000	0·000	0·000	0·000
Surrey	0·000	0·000	0·000	0·000
Warwick	0·000	0·000	0·000	0·000
West Sussex	0·000	0·000	0·000	0·000
Wiltshire	·213	·213	·416	·128
Total Shires	10·780	5·059	6·878	6·955
England	250·649	169·668	—	—

Notes:

1. Comparable figures for 1984-85 outurn and 1985-86 bid for the GLC are not available, since the GLC is no longer responsible for London Transport.
2. Figures for Tyne and Wear exclude expenditure on the Metro.
3. Expenditure on new buses is not included.

Highway Maintenance Expenditure (£ million cash)

	Bid	*1984-85 Accepted*	*Forecast outturn*	*1985-86 Bid*
GLC	160·417	121·300	144·829	157·850
GMC	42·821	42·137	43·237	46·927
Merseyside	28·315	28·050	25·972	33·450
South Yorkshire	34·648	25·340	30·429	35·974
Tyne/Wear	22·600	21·925	24·808	25·800
West Midlands	51·845	46·755	49·859	56·353
West Yorkshire	43·723	37·477	36·602	45·795
Total Metropolitans	223·952	201·684	210·907	244·299
Avon	18·800	17·375	15·300	18·950
Bedford	10·660	10·121	9·553	11·739
Berkshire	9·533	9·535	9·482	10·202
Buckingham	11·348	10·505	10·791	11·880
Cambridge	10·826	10·313	9·789	9·787
Cheshire	19·250	18·140	16·375	20·100
Cleveland	13·780	11·102	11·719	16·590
Cornwall	12·430	12·380	11·858	12·750
Cumbria	15·041	14·700	11·880	13·505
Derbyshire	18·938	18·000	14·220	15·121
Devon	26·657	24·555	25·161	26·799
Dorset	13·490	12·654	12·634	13·900
Durham	13·484	13·484	12·851	13·581
East Sussex	9·903	9·903	9·794	11·938
Essex	27·854	26·208	25·089	29·526
Gloucester	10·570	10·256	10·301	10·343
Hampshire	22·191	22·191	22·449	23·723
Herefordshire/ Worcestershire	14·610	12·295	11·990	15·344
Hertford	17·424	16·426	15·820	18·722
Humberside	19·718	19·533	18·963	20·173
Isle of Wight	3·970	3·970	2·849	3·565
Kent	28·643	26·992	27·174	30·613
Lancashire	36·678	29·892	28·035	38·599
Leicester	17·640	16·727	16·309	18·725
Lincoln	16·550	16·550	15·922	16·591
Norfolk	13·520	13·520	13·572	14·342
Northampton	10·360	10·300	9·380	11·050
Northumberland	9·000	9·000	8·696	9·127
North Yorkshire	21·560	21·560	19·510	22·753
Nottingham	18·783	17·120	16·642	16·964
Oxford	8·544	8·544	8·209	8·412
Shropshire	9·502	9·252	8·843	10·765
Somerset	11·350	11·155	11·736	12·347
Stafford	18·519	16·800	16·425	17·754
Suffolk	12·783	11·910	12·333	13·446
Surrey	18·805	18·805	17·485	18·478
Warwick	10·197	10·197	9·469	10·059
West Sussex	12·733	12·733	12·661	13·735
Wiltshire	10·839	9·908	10·857	11·465
Total Shires	606·485	574·611	552·126	623·463
England	990·854	897·595	907·862	1025·612

Expenditure on Public Transport Revenue Support

£ million cash

	Bid	*1984-85 Accepted*	*Forecast outturn*	*1985-86 Bid*
GLC	235·803	90·000	—	—
GMC	63·900	42·000	49·223	59·000
Merseyside	70·690	34·000	66·000	68·000
South Yorkshire	68·200	12·200	59·200	n/a
Tyne/Wear	22·500	15·200	22·503	23·900
West Midlands	38·750	25·400	28·500	n/a
West Yorkshire	53·807	36·000	41·600	42·460
Total Metropolitans	317·847	164·800	267·026	—
Avon	4·900	4·455	4·800	5·040
Bedford	0·963	0·963	0·943	0·995
Berkshire	1·701	1·701	1·631	1·696
Buckingham	2·035	1·594	1·351	1·150
Cambridge	0·810	0·810	0·839	1·053
Cheshire	6.354	5·390	5·786	6·324
Cleveland	8·139	3·401	7·159	7·796

	Bid	1984-85 Accepted	Forecast outturn	1985-86 Bid
Cornwall	1·530	1·530	1·470	1·580
Cumbria	3·797	2·907	2·558	3·558
Derbyshire	6.011	5·515	5·142	5·667
Devon	1·515	1·515	1·168	1·282
Dorset	1·610	1·610	1·610	1·690
Durham	2·374	2·374	2·334	2·457
East Sussex	2·624	2·624	2·566	2·504
Essex	3·859	3·859	3·759	4·267
Gloucester	0·701	0·701	0·739	0·778
Hampshire	3·819	3·819	3·500	4·019
Hereford/Worcester	1·387	1·387	1·164	1·334
Hertford	8·404	6·002	7·686	6·269
Humberside	4·108	3·515	3·982	4·425
Isle of Wight	0·526	0·526	0·455	0·460
Kent	3·253	3·253	3·247	3·416
Lancashire	11·522	8·305	10·017	11·890
Leicester	2·564	2·564	2·354	2·910
Lincoln	0·921	0·921	0·818	0·889
Norfolk	1·118	1·108	1·041	1·074
Northampton	1·390	1·390	1·180	1·380
Northumberland	0·700	0·700	0·540	0·714
North Yorkshire	1·700	1·700	1·615	1·700
Nottingham	4·189	3·105	2·423	3·151
Oxford	0·331	0·331	0·450	0·539
Shropshire	0·934	0·934	0·919	1·078
Somerset	0·582	0·582	0·582	0·611
Stafford	4·380	4·380	4·380	4·610
Suffolk	0·576	0·576	0·443	0·609
Surrey	5·073	4·892	4·763	5·147
Warwick	0·650	0·650	0·415	0·680
West Sussex	2·361	2·339	1·859	2·000
Wiltshire	0·904	0·904	0·922	1·251
Total Shires	110·315	94·832	98·610	107·993
England	663·965	349·632	—	—

Notes:

1. Comparable figures for 1984-85 outturn and 1985-86 bid for the GLC are not available, since the GLC is no longer responsible for London Transport.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he or his officials have had with nationalised transport industries regarding the seeking of injunctions by the industries against secondary picketing of their installations in the current miners' dispute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: I have naturally been kept in close touch, by the chairmen of nationalised transport industries, with issues arising from the miners' dispute. The Government have made it clear that they would not wish to discourage any employers from using the legal remedies which are available to them as a result of the employment legislation. Action under these provisions must, however, be a judgment for individual managements.

Public Service Vehicle Test

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Transport how the failure of vehicles owned by *(a)* the National Bus Company and *(b)* municipal transport undertakings compare with other operators in the annual public service vehicle test.

Mrs. Chalker: Statistics are based on five types of operator; details, which cover England, Scotland and Wales ar as follows for the last complete year 1984-84:

	National Bus Co	Local authority vehicles (inc PTEs)	Scottish Bus Grp	London Transport	Private
Number Tested	14,173	14,415	3,105	4,965	28,634
Number Failed	1,691	2,29	677	562	8,766
Percentage failed	11·93	15·60	21·80	11·32	30·61

M1-M6 (Lighting)

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for Transport what present plans he has for lighting those sections of the M1 and M6 motorways currently unlit; and whether he will estimate the cost of providing full lighting along the complete lengths of these routes.

Mrs. Chalker: Lighting is planned to be installed on the M1 between Newport Pagnell service area and junction 16.

The estimated cost of providing lighting on the unlit lengths of the M1 and M6 motorways would be approximately £9 million and £13·5 million, respectively, at 1982-83 prices.

Falling Objects (Unidentified Aircraft)

Mr. Favell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to provide for compensation to be paid in respect of damage or injury caused by objects falling from unidentified aircraft.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No. Air transport operators are absolutely liable for damage or injury caused to persons or property on the ground caused by objects falling from aircraft. I do not consider that legislation is necessary. Incidents are relatively infrequent and in the few cases where the aircraft cannot be traced financial compensation can be obtained under normal household and personal accident insurance policies. I see no justification for creating a scheme to investigate, assess and pay out claims when suitable resources and expertise are already available on the commercial market.

Mr. J. T. Beasley

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the relevant employment experience or professional qualifications in respect of public transport which he took into account when appointing Mr. J. T. Beasley to the board of London Regional Transport with a responsibility for bus services.

Mrs. Chalker: The qualifications for appointment to the board of London Regional Transport are specified in schedule 1 to the London Regional Transport Act 1984. Mr. Telford Beasley has an impressive record of achievement in his career to date, and my right hon. Friend is in no doubt that his qualifications and experience are those required to run a business with expenditure of £435 million and some 30,000 staff.

Cross-Channel Link

Mr. Parris asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the cross-Channel link.

Mr. David Mitchell: The Government's position remains as stated in my right hon. Friend's reply to the questions by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Sir J. Wells) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on 22 May 1984, at column 380.

Mr. Parris asked the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had regarding the Channel tunnel project since the publication of the Banks Report in May.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend has had numerous discussions with promoting groups and with financial institutions interested in carrying forward one or other of the various proposals for a Channel fixed link.

Mr. Parris asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to raise the cross-Channel link with his French counterpart.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend will discuss this with his French counterpart on 14 November.

Brampton Bypass

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will report on the progress made over the last 12 months on preparing the scheme for the Brampton bypass; and whether he expects to be able to publish a preferred route by January 1985.

Mrs. Chalker: We have been considering in detail the options north and south of the town which I announced in October 1983, along with some variations suggested during our consultations with local councils and other statutory bodies. These somewhat complex studies will not be finished in time for me to make an announcement about the route in January, but I certainly hope to do this within the next few months.

Level Crossings (Pedestrian Safety)

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has completed his consideration of the report of the committee of inquiry into pedestrian safety at public road level crossings; and what conclusions he has reached.

Mr. David Mitchell: Consultations on the committee's report have now been completed. The committee's main conclusions have been widely welcomed and endorsed. This is a well-deserved tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mrs. Oppenheim) and the members of her committee.

The committee reached three main conclusions. First, it concluded that, subject to the qualifications set out in the committee's report, automatic crossings are no less safe for pedestrians than the gated crossings they replace. Second, the committee was clear that insufficient weight has been placed in the past on the natural concern created by automation. It concluded that a much more determined effort will need to be made by British Railways to involve local people at the formative stage of a modernisation proposal. Third, the committee concluded that the present guidelines and criteria which apply to modernisation proposals make inadequate provision for pedestrians. A clearer set of principles and guidelines should determine these provisions. Pedestrians should be provided with more space, clearer separation and increased physical protection from rail and road traffic as traffic levels increase.

I fully accept these conclusions. They provide the necessary reassurance and preconditions for British Rail to proceed with the modernisation of level crossings and thus help to safeguard the future of many local railways lines.

The committee also produced 16 detailed recommendations and guidelines. The consultations indicated considerable support for the spirit of these recommendations but disagreement with some of the specific proposals. It is legitimate that there should be differences of opinion on matters of technical detail, and I have concluded that the right course for the future is to be guided by the spirit of the recommendations while taking account of all the comments we have received on them.

I have accordingly asked the railway inspectorate to review the published "Railway Construction and Operation Requirements for Level Crossings", taking account of the committee's report and the comments made on it. The result will be revised criteria and guidelines to safeguard pedestrians at level crossings. I have asked the inspectorate to give particular consideration to the needs of disabled people. In revising the requirements, the inspectorate will also be reviewing the present arrangements for keeping records of accidents at level crossings; ensuring that distinctive general warning signs are used; standardising audible warnings at new automatic crossings; and establishing technical criteria for the appropriate form of protection to be provided at crossings in different circumstances. My Department will also be writing to highway authorities asking for their co-operation with British Rail where this is appropriate. I shall be discussing with the British Railways Board its proposals for improving its arrangements for consultation and publicity.

Finally, I wish to emphasise the Government's gratitude to the committee for its full, timely and thorough report.

SCOTLAND

Teachers (Salaries)

68. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will be making a decision on the establishment of an independent review on Teachers' Salaries.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 9 November 1984 at column *11*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie).

Job Creation

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will categorise the number of new jobs created in Scotland in the latest year as follows: *(a)* filled by full-time male employees, *(b)* filled by part-time male employees, *(c)* filled by full-time female employees and *(d)* filled by part-time female employees.

Mr. Allan Stewart: This information is not available. However, in the year to 31 October 1984, 15,007 new jobs were associated with offers of selective financial assistance under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 for projects in Scotland.

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will categorise the number of new jobs created in Dundee in the latest year as filled by the following: *(a)* full-time male employees, *(b)* part-time male employees, *(c)* full-time female employees and *(d)* part-time female employees.

Mr. Allan Stewart: This information is not available. However, in the year to 31 October 1984, 530 new jobs were associated with offers of selective financial assistance under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 for projects in Dundee.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information his Department has on the incidence of cervical cancer in Scotland in the past three years.

Mr. John MacKay: Information about the incidence of this disease is not available centrally. However, the number of cases of cancer of the cervix is given in section 3(10) of the "Scottish Health Statistics 1982" and section 3(5) of the "Advance Tables, June 1984", both of which are in the Library.

School Meals

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current qualifying limits for receipt of free school meals in each education authority; and if he has been informed of any anticipated change in 1984-85.

Mr. Allan Stewart: All education authorities have a statutory duty to provide free school meals for pupils whose families are in receipt of supplementary benefit or family income supplement. The following authorities are also currently awarding free meals to some children on the basis of their family's income:

Maximum qualifying income for a family with one child

Education authority	£
Central	69·30
Fife	65·14
Strathclyde	65·35
Orkney	53·65
Shetlands	61·83
Western Isles	88·50

In addition, Dumfries and Galloway take family income into account when considering appeals relating to the provision of free school meals.

In 1984, only Borders regional council used receipt of unemployment benefit as an additional qualification for school meals.

Grampian, Highland and Tayside regions also provide free school meals to pupils whose families are in receipt of housing benefit supplement.

I am not aware of any proposed changes in these arrangements.

Roads

Mr. David Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of kilometers of motorway *(a)* in use *(b)* under construction and *(c)* planned but not under construction on 1 November for the years 1983 and 1984.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

Motorway in Scotland: km.

	In use	*Under Construction*	*Planned*
1 November 1983	236	—	64
1 November 1984	236	12	52

Labour Statistics

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the level of unemployment in the city of Edinburgh on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date;

(2) if he will give the percentage of unemployment in the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date;

(3) if he will list the level of unemployment in the city of Glasgow on *(a)* a constituency basis and *(b)* a ward basis at the latest date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Unemployment rates are calculated only for regions in Scotland and travel-to-work areas. Together with unemployment totals by constituency, these figures are now available in the House of Commons Library. Individual ward totals will be made available from mid-1985.

NHS (Pay Beds)

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many private beds are available in National Health Service hospitals in Scotland; what percentage of health service beds this figure represents; and what was the income from these beds in the financial year 1983-84.

Mr. John MacKay: This information is as follows:

	Beds
Number of authorised private beds	109
National Health Service bed complement, Scotland	60,000
Percentage of private beds to National Health Service beds, Scotland	0·18
Income from private beds 1983-84	£950,280

Government Forensic Service

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the names and positions of the Government forensic experts and former employees of the Government forensic service who gave evidence in the John Preece appeal case.

Mr. Younger: The following members of the Home Office forensic science service gave evidence when Mr.

John Preece's case was referred by me to the High Court of Justiciary in terms of section 263(1)*(a)* of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975: the appointments shown were those held at the time of the hearing in June 1981. No other Government forensic experts or former employees gave evidence at the hearing.

Dr. A. S. Curry
Controller Home Office Forensic Science Service (now retired)
Mr. S. S. Kind
Director Home Office Forensic Science Service Central Research Establishment
Miss Margaret Pereira
Director Regional Forensic Science Laboratory, Chepstow (now Controller of the Home Office Forensic Science Service)
Mr. J. L. Fish
Director Regional Forensic Science Laboratory, Birmingham
Dr. A. Clift
Principal Scientific Officer Regional Forensic Science Laboratory, Birmingham
Dr. R. P. G. Gregory
Principal Scientific Officer Regional Forensic Science Laboratory, Weatherby

Dr. Alan Clift

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library the report prepared by Dr. Clift for the Scottish appeal case of John Preece.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I have been asked to reply.

Full information on the matters of interest to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) was given in a written reply on 28 February 1984, at column *134*. However, I will arrange for copies of the three reports by Dr. Clift which were lodged as productions in the trial in 1973 of John Preece to be placed in the Library.

New Town Development Corporations

Mr. Henderson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what conclusions he has reached about the appropriate timing of wind-up of each of the Scottish new town development corporations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: I announced my conclusions about the future of the Scottish new towns on 23 July 1982, at columns 313-14. I made it clear then that I considered the new towns, administered by the development corporations, to have been highly successful in contributing to the general economic growth and increased employment opportunities of all kinds, and that they continued to have considerable potential in their role of stimulating employment and underpinning the economy as a whole. I also referred, however, to the need to make advance provision for the winding-up arrangements which would commence as a development corporation's task neared completion and to my decision that wind-up should begin when a specified percentage for a new town's designated population had been reached. To help assess the appropriate percentages for each town, each development corporation was invited to draw up and submit a detailed development profile setting out what tasks it considered it had still to carry out before its task was complete, together with proposed programmes to achieve this.

The five Scottish new towns have completed and submitted their development profiles. These were circulated to the regional and district councils within which each new town is situated and they were given an opportunity to comment. I have considered the profiles and the comments submitted, separately and carefully. There is no doubt that the preparation of these documents has been a valuable exercise for all concerned, involving a detailed review of the achievements, resources, and remaining objectives of the corporations, together with an assessment of how best to achieve these remaining objectives.

I made it clear in 1982 that I did not expect any new town development corporations to be wound up before the end of the 1980s. I have adhered to that view.

I have come to the conclusion that the new towns should begin the winding-up process, which I envisage would take up to five years, when the following percentages of their existing designated populations are reached:

Town	*Trigger per cent.*	*Designated population*	*Population at trigger per cent.*	*Present population*
East Kilbride	90	82,500	74,250	70,600
Glenrothes	79	55,000	43,000	36,750
Cumbernauld	77	70,000	54,000	49,500
Livingston	71	70,000	49,500	39,200
Irvine	66	95,000	63,000	56,400

The dates on which these triggers are likely to be reached cannot, of course, be predicted with complete certainty, but no development corporation is likely to achieve its trigger percentage until around 1990. In order that the development corporations may plan for the effective completion of their remaining tasks, I have decided that no corporation should begin wind-up before 1 April 1990, even if its populations percentage trigger is reached earlier. The percentages I have quoted above are broadly consistent with the new towns commencing wind-up at different dates in the 1990s. In view of the difficulties of predicting demographic trends, I intend to review the percentages and probable timing for all the towns five years from now—1989.

I consider that the Scottish new town development corporations have been highly effective in providing the sort of environment in which both domestic and overseas industries can flourish. They have been particularly successful in recent years in attracting the new high technology industries to Scotland and in providing growing employment in the industries of the future. They have an important and continuing role to play, not least in the continuing attraction of mobile investment projects to Scotland, and in making a major contribution to their

respective regional and national economies, all while pursuing the task of creating fully developed and balanced communities.

I hope that this statement will remove any lingering uncertainty about the development corporations' future role or prospects. The Scottish development corporations will continue to do a good job and to enjoy the full support of this Government.

Housing Defects Act 1984

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will make a statement about the implementation in Scotland of the scheme of assistance for private owners of prefabricated reinforced concrete houses under the Housing Defects Act 1984.

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Construction, in his reply to his hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Powley) and the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) on Monday 12 November, at columns *133-34*, confirmed that the Housing Defects Act 1984 would come into effect in Great Britain on 1 December 1984.

I have by virtue of the Housing Defects (Prefabricated Reinforced Concrete Dwellings) (Scotland) Designations 1984, made on 2 November 1984, designated for the purposes of the scheme of assistance in Scotland the following classes of building, as described in the designations:

Ayrshire County Council (Lindsay)*
Blackburn Orlit*
Boot
Dorran
Myton-Clyde
Orlit
Tarran
Tarran-Clyde
Tee Beam*
Unitroy*
Whitson-Fairhurst*
Winget

* These are types found only in Scotland. Myton-Clyde is the Scottish equivalent of the Myton in England.

There will be a 10-year period from 1 December 1984 within which owners may apply for assistance. In common with England and Wales, there will be an expenditure limit, for the purpose of calculating the amount of reinstatement grant payable in each case, of £14,000 for all types of defective dwelling under the Act. There will also be a common cut-off date, by which an owner must normally have bought his or her dwelling in order to be eligible for assistance under the Act, of 26 April 1984 for all classes of building.

A circular is to be issued shortly to all housing authorities in Scotland about the Act and the scheme of assistance for owners of prefabricated reinforced concrete dwellings.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authorities (Expenditure Targets)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list those local authorities whose provisional expenditure targets for 1985-86 have been increased by 5 per cent. or more, by 10 per cent. or more, by 15 per cent. or more and by 20 per cent. or more, showing for each authority the percentage overspend or underspend on target and on grant related expenditure budgeted in 1984-85;

(2) if he will publish a list of the 10 authorities, excluding non-metropolitan districts, with the smallest increase, or largest decrease, in their expenditure target between *(a)* 1984-85 and 1985-86 and *(b)* 1982-83 and 1985-86;

(3) if he will publish a list of the top 10 authorities, excluding non-metropolitan districts, in terms of the interest in their expenditure target between *(a)* 1984-85 and 1985-86 and *(b)* 1982-83 and 1985-86.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I have placed the information in the House Library.

Rate Support Grant

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total payment of rate support grant in each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The information for local authorities in England is as follows:

*Rate Support Grants**

	£ million
1981-82	9,035
1982-83	9,013
1983-84	9,082
1984-85	8,841

* Rate Support Grants = Domestic rate relief grant (as given in rate support grant settlement) + Block grant (as reported by local authorities. 1981-82 and 1982-83 figures based on outturn, 1983-84 on revised estimates and 1984-85 on budgets).

Specific and Supplementary Grants

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total payment of specific and supplementary grants in each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The information for local authorities in England is as follows:

*Specicific and Supplementary Grants**

	£ million
1981-82	1,930
1982-83	2,223
1983-84	2,435
1984-85	2,629

* Specific and supplementary grants defined as relevant for rate support grant purposes and as reported by local authorities. 1981-82 and 1982-83 figures based on outturn, 1983-84 on revised estimates and 1984-85 on budgets.

Local Authorities (Fees and Charges Income)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total local authority income from fees and charges in each year from 1981-82 to 1984-85.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The available information for English local authorities is as follows:

Fees and charges on rate fund services	£ million
1981-82	1,830
1982-83	1,955

The information is derived from local authorities' outturn forms which are not yet available for 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Beaches (Pollution)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will introduce legislation to seek to restrict pollution of British beaches not currently covered by Community legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Since July 1984 all new discharges of effluent to coastal and estuarial waters have required consent under Part II of the Control of Pollution Act, 1974. The Government have announced their intention to make regulations extending this control to all such discharges begun prior to that date. In addition, under the international convention for the prevention of pollution from ships (MARPOL), the discharge of oil from ships is totally prohibited within 12 miles of the coast, and at greater distances is strictly controlled.

Gipsies

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will consider introducing legislation to relax the provisions relating to the eviction of gipsies;

(2) if he will introduce legislation to facilitate the eviction of gipsies.

Mr. Macfarlane: The specific powers of eviction applicable to gipsies are those available when an area is designated under section 12 of the Caravan Sites Act 1968. In general these can be obtained when my right hon. Friend can be satisfied that adequate provision is made for the accommodation of gipsies in the area to be designated. Measures we introduced in 1980 simplified the eviction procedures and established a system of Exchequer capital grants to help authorities to provide sites. I have no current plans for further amendments.

Questions regarding trespass in general are matters for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Planning Applications

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning applications are now outstanding in his Department; what is the longest period that an application has awaited his decision; how many have been outstanding more than *(a)* three months, *(b)* six months, *(c)* nine months and *(d)* 12 months and over; and what steps he is taking to speed up the decision-making process.

Mr. Macfarlane: Planning applications are made to the local planning authority and there is a right of appeal to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. At the end of September 1984 the Department had 7,893 appeals in hand, of which 214 were in abeyance at the request of the parties. The breakdown of the remaining cases is as follows:

	Number
(a) Over 3 months old	4,054
(b) Over 6 months old	1,512
(c) Over 9 months old	581
(d) Over 12 months old	372

The Department does not keep records of the longest period that an appeal has awaited a decision. Some cases are delayed with the agreement of both parties pending the resolution of issues such as structure plan policies.

Additional resources are already being provided to deal with the rising number of appeals.

Brixton Cares for Kids

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if payment of inner city partnership grants to Brixton Cares for Kids has been terminated; how much grant has been paid; and what lessons are to be drawn from his Department's experience with this project.

Sir George Young: Payment of urban programme grant to Brixton Cares for Kids, a project which has, until recently, run successfully, was terminated when the group decided to dissolve earlier this year. The amount of grant paid up to the date of termination was:

	£
Capital:	46,724
Revenue:	
1982-83	25,830
1983-84	44,690
1984-85	11,000

An inquiry into the project has been held by Lambeth council's social services directorate and the result of this is expected shortly. Until the inquiry has been completed, it would be inappropriate to comment further.

Tenants Charter

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the number of local authorities which specifically maintain lists available to the public of their tenants who are prepared to take advantage of the provisions of the tenants charter by sub-letting.

Sir George Young: My Department does not hold such information.

Housing Grants

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to publish a consultative document on the future of housing repair and improvement grants; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Secretary of State for Wales hope to issue a consultation document on private sector home improvement policy shortly.

Home Insulation

Mr. Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* figures showing in constant prices expenditure by local authorities on insulation of their housing stock for each of

the last five years; and if he is satisfied that the inclusion of grants for such expenditure in the general allocation has not resulted in a fall in expenditure.

Sir George Young: Expenditure by English local authorities on their own stock in specific energy conservation schemes is estimated to be:—

	£ million 1983-84 cost terms
1979-80	43·8
1980-81	16·8
1981-82	13·1
1982-83	21·7
1983-84*	17·1

*Revised

Progress remains on average ahead of the original target of 200,000 dwellings to be insulated per annum. Expenditure on insulation incurred as part of more general improvement, conversion or repair work is not included.

Local Government Expenditure

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what criteria he intends using to determine which groups are genuine voluntary sector groups for the purposes of approving funding under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984;

(2) by what criteria he will determine that it would not be expedient for a metropolitan county council to incur expenditure under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 as a result of fresh commitments entered into after 26 June which would fall due from 1 April 1985.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Each application for my consent to expenditure under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 is considered on its merits in the light of all relevant considerations.

Local Government Reform

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent response he has received from the Association of Metropolitan Authorities concerning the Government's plans for planning functions in metropolitan county areas in the event that the metropolitan county councils are abolished.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: None, since the response, in January 1984, to the "Streamlining the Cities" White Paper (Cmnd. 9063).

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what estimate he has made of the expected staffing implications for his Department of the expenditure controls which he introduced in the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act;

(2) if he has taken any steps to determine what staff resources he will require to carry out work arising in his Department from the control of general expenditure powers, the control of disposals of land and the control of contracts arising from the metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council.

(3) what is the amount of his Department's voted provision in the current financial year and in 1985-86 to cover the cost of work associated with carrying out the control of general expenditure powers, the control of disposals of land and the control of contracts arising from the metropolitan county councils and the Greater London council.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: Enough staff will be employed to ensure that applications for specific consent are dealt with expeditiously, but the numbers required will depend upon decisions of the authorities concerned, and on the scope of consents of a general nature that are issued under the legislation. The cost will be met from within the Department's voted provision for the current financial year. The Department will be seeking appropriate provision for 1985-86.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate the Government made, and on what basis, of the likely expenditure and manpower consequences of their proposals before publishing Cmnd. 9063.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: No detailed estimates were made because the financial and manpower implications of abolition will depend largely on decisions yet to be taken by successor authorities.

I will be publishing our latest estimates very shortly.

Local Government (Manpower)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had and what representations he has received from civil service trade unions about the manpower implications of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The departmental trade union side has been fully informed at all stages of the staffing arrangements required to administer the provisions of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act. No specific representations on this issue have been made.

Grant-related Expenditure

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all those authorities whose grant-related expenditure in 1984-85 exceeds their expenditure target, showing the respective figures for each authority.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I have placed the information in the House Library.

Private Flats (London)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many households there are in privately owned blocks of flats built before 1 July 1948 in Westminster, Camden and Kensington and Chelsea.

Sir George Young: I regret that the information is not available in the form requested. The numbers of households accommodated in privately rented or owner occupied purpose built flats constructed before 1940 as estimated from the "National Dwelling and Housing Survey 1977" were 10,800 in Westminster with a further 3,200 age unrecorded and 9,300 in Kensington and Chelsea with a further 1,200 age unrecorded. In Camden, the age of the building was unrecorded for virtually all properties.

Regional Water Authorities

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will give details of the code of practice formulated between his Department, the Water Authorities Association and the Guild of British Newspaper Editors regarding publicity for the meetings of regional water authorities and their committees.

Mr. Macfarlane: I am sending to my hon. Friend a copy of the Code which water authority chairmen drew up in consultation with the Guild and which Ministers endorsed.

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the extent to which regional water authorities are now publishing material about items to be discussed at meetings of each authority and its committees and holding press conferences after such meetings.

Mr. Macfarlane: These matters are provided for in the code of practice which water authority chairmen have drawn up in consultation with the Guild of British Newspaper Editors.

Its detailed operation is a matter for the authorities themselves as independent statutory bodies. I understand, however, that they are adhering to it.

General Development Order (Planning Controls)

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes concerning planning controls on agricultural buildings and farm roads Her Majesty's Government intend to propose or make in the current revision of the general development order.

Mr. Macfarlane: I am considering the wide-ranging responses to our consultation paper on a number of possible changes to the General Development Order. Since issuing that consultation paper a report by the Countryside Commission on the future of the uplands has called for tighter planning controls over farm roads, and so on in upland areas. The recommendations in that report are also under consideration.

Planning Inspectors

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will categorise the career backgrounds of planning inspectors appointed to his Department in each of the last five years, as between those with previous experience of planning and related matters, and those with none; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: All planning inspectors appointed to my Department over the last five years had experience of planning or related matters.

Candidates for appointment as inspector must have had prior experience of the planning or housing Acts or have served in a senior administrative or managerial post requiring knowledge of judicial or quasi-judicial procedures.

Candidates for appointment as senior inspector must have had direct experience at a responsible level of the preparation and implementation of development plans and of development control.

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in the *Official Report* the number of planning inspectors in his Department and the number of planning appeals dealt with in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Macfarlane: During the past five years the number of full-time Inspectors on 1 July was as follows:

Year	*Number*
1979	203
1980	193
1981	190
1982	184
1983	174
1984	176

The number of section 36 appeals dealt with are as follows:

Year	*Received*	*Decided*
1979	12,990	8,933
1980	16,208	13,130
1981	16,637	14,451
1982	13,900	12,915
1983	13,699	11,221

At the moment there are 173 Inspectors and during the first three quarters of this year 11,453 appeals have been received and 8,743 decided.

A recruitment competition to replace expected retirements and to increase the complement of inspectors by seven is currently under way.

A panel of part-time fee-paid inspectors, at present numbering 81, assists the inspectorate with its section 36 casework. The number of Inspectors on the panel varies considerably and details of the numbers in former years is not readily available.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Computer Services (West Midlands)

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many administrative staff have been specifically employed either as research assistants or computer programmers on the West Midlands regional health authority's computer services for each year since 1979 to the latest available date.

Mr. John Patten: Information such as my hon. Friend seeks is not collected centrally. He may wish to write to the chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority, which may be able to let him have the required information.

Benefits (Dundee)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the total value of the successful claims to benefit during the welfare benefits take-up campaign in Dundee in April.

Mr. Whitney: The total value of successful claims to benefit during the welfare benefits take-up campaign in Dundee in April was as follows:

	£
Increase in weekly amount paid to new and existing beneficaries	1726·25
One-off payments	12,639·18

Funeral Expenses

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information his Department has on the average cost of funeral expenses in the past three years.

Mr. Whitney: Information on funeral expenses is not collected by the Department, but I understand that the cost of a funeral varies widely in the range of £350 to £650.

Blind Persons

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will estimate the number of registered blind persons in receipt of mobility, invalidity or attendance allowances who are not suffering from a second disability in addition to blindness.

Mr. Newton: I regret that estimates cannot be provided in the form requested.

The latest information available shows that some 13,600 people with a visual impairment qualify for attendance allowance; some 3,000 people suffering from blindness or low vision qualify for contributory invalidity pension; and some 1,200 people with disorders of the eye qualify for non-contributory invalidity pension. Similar information is not available for mobility allowance. It is not known how many of those included in the figures above are registered blind or also suffer from a second disability.

Mr. Loyden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration he is giving to enhancing the living standards of blind people.

Mr. Newton: In looking for further practical improvements towards our objective of a more coherent system of benefits for disabled people we think it generally more appropriate to concentrate on helping all disabled people with particular needs rather than to single out particular types of disability.

To help the development of policy in the longer term we have commissioned a comprehensive survey from the office of Population Censuses and Surveys to provide up-to-date information about disabled people, including those with sensory impairment, their circumstances and their needs. We have also carried out a series of fact finding visits into the level of services locally for visually handicapped people and the information collected is currently being analysed.

Solvent Abuse

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he has taken on matters within his responsibility and what further steps he proposes to curb glue sniffing and solvent abuse.

Mr. John Patten: My reply of 26 July at columns 770-71, to my hon. Friend, gave a progress report on action being taken by the Government to deal with the problem of solvent misuse in England and Wales. Since then the National Children's Bureau post referred to in the reply has been filled. We have also issued, through a circular to health and local authorities, guidance on the distribution of a Health Education Council leaflet giving advice to parents and professionals concerned with children misusing solvents.

The wide range of measures taken will continue to help parents and workers to co-operate more effectively to discourage solvent misuse through education and persuasion.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many *(a)* one-parent families, *(b)* pensioners and *(c)* unemployed received supplementary benefits in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Whitney: The numbers in receipt of supplementary benefit at November-December each year were as follows:

Year	*Pensioners*	*One-Parent Families**	*(thousands) Unemployed*
1979	1,723	306	566
1980	1,694	316	854
1981	1,738	369	1,318
1982	1,781	415	1,722
1983†	1,643	448	1,818

* Excludes a small number of single parents claiming for reasons other than being a single parent.
† Provisional.
Source: Annual Statistical Enquiry.

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people received supplementary benefit in 1966 and 1983, respectively.

Mr. Whitney: The number of claimants receiving supplementary benefit at December 1966 was 2·5 million, compared with 4·3 million (provisional) at December 1983.

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiry.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Terry Fields asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he is satisfied that local authorities are able to exercise sufficient control over the establishment of private residential nursing homes; whether he considers that adequate regular inspections of such establishments are being carried out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I would refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. Hughes) on 6 November, at column *47*.

Burnley

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the staff levels at his Department's Burnley offices; how these compare with one year ago; and whether any changes are proposed.

Mr. Whitney: The complement of staff allocated to the Burnley office on 1 November 1983 was 196 and the actual staff in post at that date was 204. The complement on 1 November 1984 was 195 and the actual staff in post at that date was 205. The Burnley office has been authorised to recruit to a staffing level of 208 by 1 December 1984.

Hospital Treatment Statistics (Mid-Staffordshire)

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will detail the number of *(a)* inpatient cases,

(b) day cases and *(c)* outpatient attendances, dealt with by each health district serving the present Mid-Staffordshire parliamentary constituency in each year since 1979.

Mr. John Patten: We do not gather information about health services provided to populations of parliamentary constituencies. My hon. Friend's constituency overlaps Mid-Staffordshire and South East Staffordshire health districts, and a significant proportion of the latter's population turns to North Birmingham health district for health services; the figures for these three health districts are given in the tables.

District Health Authority	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Inpatient discharges and deaths					
Mid Staffordshire	16,784	17,691	18,404	19,398	21,521
South East Staffordshire	16,395	17,420	17,654	18,217	18,000
North Birmingham	23,395	22,657	24,283	24,597	24,517
Day case attendances					
Mid Staffordshire	1,375	1,957	1,951	1,988	2,173
South East Staffordshire	2,916	3,062	3,230	3,376	3,481
North Birmingham	1,675	1,862	2,258	2,499	2,680
Outpatient attendances					
Mid Staffordshire	97,550	105,100	107,952	110,308	104,076
South East Staffordshire	92,999	93,287	101,920	105,911	110,314
North Birmingham	161,679	165,711	161,571	160,484	157,872

Privatisation

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many authorities have so far complied with Government plans to privatise cleaning, catering and laundry services; and what savings have been made;

(2) if he will list the sanctions available to him against authorities which do not comply with Government policy regarding privatisation of services; whether he is satisfied that they are effective; and if he has any plans to seek further powers in this area.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We expect all health authorities to comply with our policy on competitive tendering for these services. Very worthwhile savings are being achieved whether the work remains in-house or goes to a private contractor. Thirty-four contracts already let to outside contractors will produce savings of over £6 million a year. Only a few health authorities are refusing at the moment to submit programmes for competitive tendering and efforts continue to point out to them that it is against the interests of their patients to fail to seek the savings and extra funds for patient care which tendering can produce. It is too soon to start talking about sanctions but we are satisfied that my right hon. Friend has sufficient powers should they be needed.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what criteria he intends to use in order to determine whether an applicant for severe disablement allowance is 80 per cent. disabled.

Mr. Newton: The level of disablement will be assessed in accordance with criteria similar to those already used in the industrial injuries and war pensions schemes. The assessment will be made not only in relation to such conditions as are prescribed in regulations but also by comparison with a normal healthy person of the same age and sex.

Certain groups, including those registered blind or partially sighted and those receiving attendance allowance or mobility allowance, will automatically be accepted as at least 80 per cent. disabled without the need for further examination.

Patients (Money)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the amount of patients' money that has accumulated in each district health authority in respect of *(a)* mobility allowance for disabled patients and *(b)* other allowances for those of retirement age; and what is the number of patients in each category in respect of whom the money is held.

Mr. Newton: Information is collected centrally only on the total money that has accumulated in patients' balances in each district health authority. No breakdown is available centrally on the sources of the money or the number of patients.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the amount of patients' money that has accumulated centrally in respect of *(a)* mobility allowance for disabled patients and *(b)* other allowances for those of retirement age; and what is the number of patients in each of these categories in respect of whom the money is held.

Mr. Newton: No patients' money is accumulated centrally.

Heart Disease

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what additional funding has ben made available to the Health Education Council for the prevention of heart disease, following the publication of the Canterbury and COMA reports;

(2) what plans he has to make specific funding available to regional and district health authorities to develop strategies for the prevention of heart disease, following the publication of the Canterbury and COMA reports.

Mr. John Patten: A major programme aimed at attacking the problem of cardiovascula disease through concerted local action is being undertaken in Wales by the Health Education Council, which is directly funded by the Government. This is intended as a pilot for future programmes in the rest of the country. Regional health authorities have identified cardiovascular disease as a

priority in their 10-year forward planning, and we expect to see them reflecting this in their allocations in future years.

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the cost to industry in the latest available year of forgone output due to premature mortality and sickness absence from work resulting from coronary heart disease,. ICD 410-414, in males and females in the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not readily available. The cost to industry of premature mortality and sickness must rest on wide-ranging assumptions which cannot easily be validated. However, in England and Wales in 1982 there were about 26,100 deaths from coronary heart disease among men aged 25 to 64 and about 3,300 among women aged 25 to 59; sickness and invalidity benefit was paid in 1981-82 for about 23 million days for men and about 1 million days for women.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will place in the Library the evidence considered by his advisory committee on gynaecological cytology about the trend in the incidence of cervical cancer in other countries.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Evidence is referred to in the report of the committee's working party on the age and frequency of screening, a copy of which is in the Library. The committee continues to evaluate similar evidence as and when it is published.

Skin Hospital, Manchester

Mr. Favell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the number of inpatients and outpatients treated for skin diseases at the Skin hospital, Manchester, in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is as follows:

Manchester Skin hospital: patients treated (all conditions)

Year	*Inpatient discharges and deaths*	*New outpatient attendances*	*Total outpatient attendances*
1974	684	13,156	33,384
1975	596	12,150	33,730
1976	460	11,576	32,601
1977	601	11,543	32,182
1978	547	11,782	29,415
1979	579	12,269	31,324
1980	647	13,127	29,744
1981	638	12,987	31,994
1982	652	12,607	30,329
1983	725	14,518	36,219

Injectable Contraceptives

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether his Department gives any guidance to health authorities about what information on possible side effects should be provided to those patients who are given injectable contraceptives.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Details of possible adverse effects of injectable contraceptives are set out in product data sheets supplied to all doctors. Depo-Provera is the only injectable preparation currently licensed for long-term use as a contraceptive. Before Depo-Provera is marketed for long-term use, the manufacturers will include in the product literature a reminder to doctors of the importance of patient counselling whenever the product is being considered for long-term use in contraception. They will also produce an information leaflet, to include information on possible side effects, which doctors will be asked to give to patients whenever they prescribe Depo-Provera for long-term use.

Doctors

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many general practitioners in *(a)* the Yorkshire regional health authority and *(b)* Leeds metropolitan district council area are over the age of 65 years on the latest available figures.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: At 1 October 1983 there were 102 unrestricted general medical practitioners aged 65 years or over practising in the Yorkshire region and 51 such doctors practising in the area of the Leeds city council.

NHS (Spectacles)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department's form G11/April 84 is correct in stating that someone cannot have private lenses fitted to National Health Service frames and that it is necessary to pay the full cost of new spectacles.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes, and that has been the position since the introduction of the NHS ophthalmic service.

Patients can obtain any lens through the NHS to meet their clinical needs and it has not therefore been considered necessary to permit the supply of private lenses under the NHS. Private lenses may be fitted to a NHS frame but the transaction would be a private one and the charge for the frame would be for agreement between the optician and the patient.

Kidney Patients

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if health authorities work to any guidelines in accepting or rejecting kidney patients for dialysis or transplant on the grounds of such social criteria as perceived employability, age or parental status.

Mr. John Patten: Whether or not to accept a patient for a particular form of treatment is entirely a matter for the doctor concerned in the light of whatever factors he considers relevant.

Pensioners (Telephone Charges)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will consider increasing benefit to cover the rental charges of telephones where they have been installed by social work departments on the basis of medical need to pensioners on supplementary pension.

Mr. Newton: We have no plans to do so. However, local authorities have powers to assist with telephone rental charges for elderly and disabled people where they are satisfied of the need for such help.

Drugs (GP Prescribing)

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the overall quantity of drugs in general and benzodiazepines in particular, prescribed by general practitioners in the past 12 months; and how these figures compare with the previous 12 months.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 November 1984, c. *47*]: The numbers of prescriptions dispensed by chemists and appliance contractors in England for all drugs, and those in the benzodiazepine group during the latest 12 months available and the previous months were as follows:

(Millions)

	All drugs	*Benzodiazepines*
October 1981—September 1982	307·9	24·4
October 1982—September 1983	314·6	23·9

Figures for benzodiazepines are based on a 1 in 200 sample of dispensed prescriptions.

Figures for all prescriptions are based on an actual count.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agriculture Council

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Agriculture Council meeting held in Brussels on 12 and 13 November.

Mr. Jopling: With my hon. Friend the Minister of State, I represented the United Kingdom at the Council of Agriculture Ministers in Brussels on 12/13 November.

The Council discussed a compromise proposal on the remaining issues in the new structures package. Since further information was needed on the financial provision for structural policy, it was not possible to reach conclusions and discussion will be resumed in December.

Commissioner Pisani reported to the Council on the serious problems in Ethiopia and North Africa generally and on the action already taken by the Community. He commended, in particular, the United Kingdom farmers' "give a tonne" campaign. I expressed our great concern over the current emergency and underlined the United Kingdom Government's support for Community action. The Council will be discussing food aid again on the basis of a paper which the Commission is preparing. I made it clear that the Community's policy on food aid is a matter for the Development Council to decide in the context of development policy generally.

There was a further lengthy discussion on wine, but no progress was possible towards the reform of this regime.

On the milk supplementary levy, I asked the Commissioner for an up-to-date report on the arrangements for implementation in all member states. I asked him also for an assurance that the Commission would take immediate steps if the arrangements for charging levy were not being properly applied in particular member states. In discussion, it was clear that the French Government were not ready to charge the levy this month. I was supported by some other member states in pointing to the unfairness to which this would give rise. With the support of seven member states, including the United Kingdom, the President asked the Commission to change the present rules so that the first collection of levy would relate to the period to the end of December. This was intended to allow all member states to proceed in parallel. The Commission will now be considering the outcome of the Council discussion. When the Commission's decision is known, I shall make a further announcement.

The French Minister drew attention to the problems facing French beef producers and asked for the Council's unanimous agreement to measures taken by the French Government. Along with a number of other Ministers, I made it clear that I was not prepared to approve the French action. The Commissioner said that the French measures did not appear to conform to the treaty and asked for more information on them.

On Dutch gas prices, the Commission confirmed that it had received the information from the Dutch Government and would be considering this issue next week. I emphasised the urgency, given that the winter heating season is upon us.

Finally, the Council discussed further a proposal designed to make a start in harmonising charging for meat inspection in the member states. This is the remaining item from the package of veterinary measures which was otherwise agreed at the June Council. The Council asked the Committee of Permanent Representatives to carry out further work in preparation for next month's Council. We emphasised the importance of early agreement on the harmonisation of inspection standards under the poultry-meat hygiene directive.

Dairy Quotas

72. **Mr. Watson** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is satisfied with the measures adopted to ensure that European Economic Community dairy quotas are not exceeded by other European Economic Community members.

Mr. Jopling: I have been most concerned that all member states should be implementing the milk supplementary levy according to the Community regulations. I again pressed the Agriculture Commissioner on this issue at the Council in Brussels on 12-13 November and I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) on the outcome of that Council.

Land Settlement Association (Tenants)

Mr. Skeet asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the number of tenants of the Land Settlement Association at Chawston and Wyboston, Bedfordshire, who have now entered into contracts for the purchase of their holdings.

Mrs. Fenner: Three tenants on the former LSA estate at Chawston and Wyboston have exchanged contracts for or completed the purchase of their holdings. In addition, a further 44 tenants have agreed the terms of their purchases subject to contract.

Straw Burning

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what conclusions were drawn from the weekly monitoring by his Department of straw burning.

Mr. Jopling: Reports received from my Department's offices around the country have indicated that less straw

has been burnt this year. More straw has been baled, in part perhaps because of the greater need for straw as feed following a dry growing season. There has been increased interest in incorporation of straw in the soil, at least among farmers on those soils which are more suited to incorporation.

Where straw has been burnt, the great majority of farmers have acted responsibly and made a real effort to comply with the requirements of the new model byelaws and with the National Farmers Union's revised code of practice. They have resulted in a considerable improvement in straw and stubble burning practices this year, and the number of incidents of bad burning has been much reduced. These reports have been borne out by the fire services, which report a reduction in the number of call-outs.

However, there is still room for improvement. I intend, through publicity, to maintain pressure on farmers to continue this improvement, in particular by burning only where there is no alternative and by paying more heed to advice on the weather conditions suitable for burning.

Slaughtermen

Mr. Hill asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether, in the current investigation by the Farm Animal Welfare Council into conditions of slaughtering of animals in abattoirs, any changes are being considered regarding the piece-rate system of payment for slaughtermen.

Mrs. Fenner: The Farm Animal Welfare Council reported to Agriculture Ministers on the welfare of red meat animals at the time of slaughter in June this year, and commented on the payment of slaughtermen on a piece-work basis. We are now considering the council's recommendations.

Mr. Hill asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what training is given to slaughtermen and what encouragement to act in a humane manner when dealing with animals for slaughter.

Mrs. Fenner: Training of slaughtermen is a matter for managements of slaughterhouses subject to any conditions laid down by local authorities in granting licences to slaughtermen. Recommendations by the Farm Animal Welfare Council regarding the training of slaughtermen are now under consideration by the Government.

Priorities Board

Mr. Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the names of the members now serving on the Priorities Board to advise him on future agricultural research; and whether he has so far received any advice from them.

Mrs. Fenner: The members of the Priorities Board for Research and Development in Agriculture and Food are as follows:

Mr. K. Durham, Chairman, Unilever plc (Chairman).
Professor R. L. Bell, Chief Scientific Adviser and Director General of the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.
Mr. R. Halstead, CBE Chairman, Beecham Group plc.
Professor Sir Hans Kornberg, FRS Professor of Biochemistry in the University of Cambridge and Master of Christ's College.
Mr. J. S. Martin, CBE, Farmer, Cambridgeshire.
Mr. J. E. Moffitt, CBE, Farmer, Northumberland.
Dr. A. M. Raven, Scientific Adviser to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland.
Sir Ralph Riley, FRS, Secretary and Deputy Chairman, Agricultural and Food Research Council.

The board's terms of reference are to advise the United Kingdom Agriculture Ministers and the chairman of the Agricultural and Food Research Council on priorities for research and development in agriculture and food and on the allocation of research and development Budgets.

We have not yet received advice from the board. It first met at the end of July and has been working on the methods which it will use to assess priorities between different sectors of research and development in agriculture and food. The substantial task of arriving at its first major set of recommendations on priorities and budget allocations will take several more months to complete and this work can be expected to occupy the Board's first year of office.

We expect to receive shortly the board's advice on matters relating to the future of the soil survey of England and Wales.

"Home Defence and the Farmer"

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will review his Department's pamphlet "Home Defence and the Farmer", originally published in 1958.

Mrs. Fenner: The pamphlet is already being reviewed with a view to publication of a revised version.

Nuclear War

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what part his Department is taking in the study of the scientific committee on problems of the environment in respect of the consequences for agriculture of nuclear war.

Mrs. Fenner: My Department is not taking part in this study.

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the scientists who have expressed reservations to him about the conclusions of the Washington conference on the long-term consequences of nuclear war.

Mrs. Fenner: Many scientists have expressed reservations about the conclusions of this conference but none has done so to me personally.

Cereal Stores (Intervention)

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the location of intervention cereal stores in the United Kingdom giving the tonnage of each category of cereal in each store for the most recent date possible.

Mr. Jopling: On 27 October, the latest date for which information is available, the location of cereals intervention stores and the quantities of cereal by category which they contained were the following:

	Tonnes
Feedwheat	
Avonmouth (3)	18,095
Birmingham	5,086

	Tonnes
Braintree	2,417
Bressingham	22,175
Christchurch	6,746
Clopton	14,360
Diss	4,051
Doncaster	24,933
Downham Market	8,024
Driffield	52,357
Droitwich	12,594
Duns	6,082
Elsworth	13,219
Ely	10,956
Finmere	27,067
Gainsborough (2)	6,314
Gateshead	2,557
Glenthrothes	6,649
Hadstock	2,882
Halesworth	17,118
Haresfield	11,166
Hartlebury	17,582
Heighington	5,670
Hemswell	36,126
Horncastle	1,213
Hull	2,284
Kings Lynn	36,692
Kirkcaldy	14,318
Locharbriggs	19,416
Lympne	8,391
Manby	32,741
Mistley	5,391
Newcastle	5,742
Ormiston	18,716
Prees Heath	8,075
Reepham	8,801
Royston	5,040
Salisbury (2)	32,926
Skegness	16,707
Snetterton	25,053
Stretham	1,995
Swindon	47,805
Tangmere	9,072
Uttoxeter	4,054
Walsingham	926
Westbury	6,647
West Wratting	2,904
Wimblington (2)	26,086
Wisbech	9,075
York	38,178
Barley	
Arbroath	11,302
Avonmouth	8,399
Bardney	5,910
Bressingham	7,005
Coventry	13,818
Doncaster	2,612
Driffield	17,534
Drumlithie	13,633
Duns	40,857
Dysart	13,755
Ely	20,006
Evanton	5,151
Fearn	7,934
Hadleigh	12,048
Halesworth	1,918
Haresfield	4,823
Hartlebury	21,541
Hemswell	14,862
Kings Lynn (2)	19,164
Laurencekirk	8,543
Locharbriggs	21,716
Manby	11,041
Membury	1,418
Newcastle	9,623
Ormiston	25,019
Ownby	7,434
Penicuik	13,990
Prees Heath	4,983
Rackheath	5,316
Roydon	10,759
St Ives	336
Skegness	3,818
Snetterton	24,975
Staughton	25,993
Stracathro	18,637
Swindon	22,736
Tangmere	12,173
Turriff (2)	36,805
Uttoxeter	20,208
Walsingham	8,525
Wingham	2,359
Witney	28,241
York	10,652
Breadmaking Wheat	
Coventry	1,191
Ford	5,095
Hadleigh	4,246
Halesworth	5,418
Kings Lynn	6,822
Methwold	351
Pebmarsh	6,408
Raydon	1,951
Skegness	698
Stretham	2,697
Swindon	22,677
Wingham	3,426
Wisbech	6,052

Notes:

Figures have been rounded to nearest tonne. Numbers in brackets after place names indicate where there is more than one store in a location.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 15 November 1984

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The Second Church Estates Commissioner

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners, for what responsibilities he answers questions.

Sir William van Straubenzee: The Second Church Estates Commissioner answers parliamentary questions upon all functions of the Church Commissioners. The Commissioners are required to direct the income from the assets entrusted to them primarily towards the support of the pay, pensions and housing of the stipendiary ministry of the Church of England. They have also other statutory responsibilities, notably in the sphere of pastoral reorganisation.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug Offences (Arrests)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of stops under section 23(2) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and the resultant arrests for drug offences in the Metropolitan police district of those aged *(a)* 16 years and under, *(b)* 17 to 18 years and *(c)* 19 to 21 years for the most recent year for which statistics are available.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the readily available information may be subject to some error as it is compiled from information recorded in station registers for operational purposes which is unsuitable for the preparation of statistical summaries. It shows 16,576 stops under section 23(2) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 in the Metropolitan police district in 1983. Information on arrests resulting from these stops does not separately identify arrests for drug offences, nor are there any centrally collected statistics by age of person stopped.

Remand System

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures the Government planned to introduce concerning the number of people remanded in custody each year; and if he will consider the introduction of a pre-trial agency to increase the amount and quality of information available to courts making bail decisions.

Mr. Mellor: The decision whether a person charged with an offence should be remanded in custody or on bail is one for the court to take in the exercise of its judical discretion, subject to the requirements of the Bail Act 1976, which creates a presumption in favour of the grant of bail. We have no present plans for changes in that Act or for the establishment of an agency such as my hon. Friend suggests.

BBC (Licence Fee)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next plans to meet the chairman of the British Broadcasting Corporation to discuss the level of the licence fee.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No such meeting is planned at present.

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what has been *(a)* the shortest and *(b)* the longest time in dealing with an individual charged with an offence in connection with the mining dispute;

(2) what is the average length of time in bringing to court people charged with offences arising in connection with the mining dispute.

Mr. Mellor: This information is not available centrally and could not be collected without disproportionate cost.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons involved in the mining dispute have been sentenced to imprisonment; and what has been the average term of imprisonment.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Between 13 March and 6 November inclusive, the latest period for which information is available centrally, 46 of those convicted of offences in connection with the miners' strike received sentences of imprisonment. The longest term of imprisonment imposed was nine months, but it is not possible from the information available centrally to calculate the average term of imprisonment.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people involved in the mining dispute have *(a)* been charged and *(b)* been dealt with by the courts since the mining dispute began.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Between 13 March and 6 November inclusive, the latest period for which information is available centrally, 6,294 people were charged with offences in connection with the miners' dispute. During the same period 2,731 cases arising from the dispute were dealt with by the courts.

Dr. Alan Clift

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the reports of the forensic experts, invited by Dr. Clift to comment on the Home Office conclusions of his work, were submitted to the retirement board.

Mr. Brittan: Yes.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence was given by Dr. Curry, the previous controller of the forensic science service, to the departmental retirement board considering the early retirement of Dr. Clift about Dr. Clift's report on the Preece case.

Mr. Brittan: As I explained in my reply to the right hon. Member's question on 14 November, at column 260, the proceedings of a departmental retirement board are held in private and it would not be appropriate to publish or indicate details of its proceedings.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Appeal Court cases which followed the investigation of Dr. Clift's work, giving the outcome and indicating the cases in which *(a)* the court evidence was reassessed by an independent expert, *(b)* the forensic material was available and re-examined by an independent witness, *(c)* the material was not available and *(d)* the sentences were stated by the court to be quashed solely because Dr. Clift had handled the material.

Mr. Brittan: I referred 11 cases to the Court of Appeal. In three of them the appellant subsequently abandoned his appeal. Of the other eight, the Court of Appeal dismissed the appeals in five cases, and quashed the convictions in three. In each of the referred cases Dr. Clift's contribution was assessed by a member of the Home Office forensic science service. In two cases, in each of which the appeal was dismissed, he was able to re-examine some of the original samples prior to the hearing; the defence arranged for these samples to be separately re-examined on its behalf. From the information available to me I understand that in no case did the court state that it had quashed the conviction solely on the ground that Dr. Clift had handled the material.

Clothing (Seizure)

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidance to magistrates advising them that, where clothing is seized by the police and is found to bear counterfeit brand names, it should not be destroyed but made available for charitable purposes.

Mr. Mellor: No. Where an application is made to a magistrates' court under the Police (Property) Act 1897 regarding property whose owner cannot be ascertained it is within the court's discretion, taking account of all the circumstances, to determine what is to be done with it. It would not be appropriate for my right hon. and learned Friend to seek to influence magistrates in their exercise of that discretion.

Breath Tests

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in the light of the recent High Court decision, he has any plans to introduce legislation to amend the Transport Act 1981 in respect of convictions for refusing breath tests.

Mrs. Chalker: I have been asked to reply.

I shall be studying the details of the case referred to by my hon. Friend. All I would say at this stage is that failure without reasonable cause to provide a specimen of breath for a breath test has been an offence since the implementation of the Road Safety Act 1967. An offence of this nature is clearly essential for the effective operation of the law in respect of drinking and driving.

Nursing Homes (Prosecutions)

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought against private residential nursing homes in the past 12 months by public, professional or governmental bodies; and how this compares with the previous 12 months.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 November 1984, c. 22]: The information readily available to me, which may be incomplete, relates to all prosecutions under the Nursing Homes Act 1975 and regulations thereunder and under the Public Health (Drainage of Trade Premises) Act 1937; it shows 378 such proceedings in 1982 and 286 in 1983.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufactured Goods

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the United Kingdom share, expressed in percentages, of trade in manufactured goods since 1954.

Mr. Fletcher: Data for 1954 are not readily available. The information for 1955 to 1983 is as follows:

United Kingdom share of exports of manufactures by the main manufacturing countries†*

	Per cent.
1955	19·9
1956	19·4
1957	18·4
1958	18·3
1959	17·9
1960	16·5
1961	16·4
1962‡	15·9
1962‡	15·5
1963	15·3
1964	14·2
1965	13·8
1966	13·2
1967	12·2
1968	11·3
1969	11·2
1970	10·6
1971	10·8
1972	9·9
1973	9·1
1974	8·5
1975	9·1
1976	8·4
1977	9·0
1978	8·9
1979	9·1
1980	9·7
1981	8·5
1982	8·4
1983	7·9
1984‖	7·8

* Taken as Standard International Trade Classification, sections 5 to 8.

† Belgium-Luxembourg, Canada, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States of America.

‡ As a result of change in 1962 in the way United States figures were compiled, there is a discontinuity in that year.

‖ Not seasonally adjusted—1st quarter.

Source: Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics.

Cereal Exports

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will state the total amount of cereals exported to *(a)* the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and *(b)* China in 1960, 1970, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983 from the European Economic Community; and whether he has any information as to the percentage this represents of their total imports.

Mr. Fletcher: The available information is as follows:

Exports of cereals by the European Community†*

	USSR		China	
	Exports to USSR	*Percentage of total USSR imports of cereals*	*Exports to China*	*Percentage of total Chinese imports‡ of cereals*
	Tonnes	*Per cent.*	*Tonnes*	*Per cent.*
1960	—	—	—	—
1970	8,267	—	447,095	7
1980	1,191,736	4	138,164	1
1981	2,262,389	5	632,813	3½
1982	2,156,658	5½	706,415	3½
1983	4,217,627	n/a	839,819	n/a

* Standard International Trade Classification, groups 041-046.
† Present membership throughout.
‡ Imports estimated by FAO.
— Indicates nil or less than half the final digit shown.
n/a=Not available.
Sources: OECD Series 'C'.
FAO Trade Yearbook.

Licensed Premises (Weights and Measures)

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations or evidence he has received about the practice of selling beer and cider in short measures in licensed premises; and whether he will seek to strengthen the law to prevent this practice.

Mr. Fletcher: Local authorities regularly review the situation and periodically make known the results of their surveys. Although problems of enforcement do exist we are not yet convinced that strengthening the law is the most appropriate solution.

Liquidations (South Tyneside)

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many companies in south Tyneside went into liquidation between 1974 to 1979 and 1979 to the latest available date.

Mr. Fletcher: I regret that figures of company liquidations are not available by area.

Banana Licensing

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the results of the review of the banana licensing arrangements, with particular reference to the effects of any changes on the banana industry in the Windward Islands.

Mr. Fletcher: Following consultations with a wide range of interested parties, revised import licensing arrangements for bananas were adopted from 1 October. More competition has been introduced by making the quota for bananas from restricted sources (the so-called dollar area) available to a larger number of traders than hitherto. A significant share, however, continues to be allocated to importers of bananas from Jamaica and the Windward Islands, who give effect to the Government's long-standing obligations to those countries to maintain their preferential position on the banana market in the United Kingdom. The changes to the licensing arrangements for dollar area bananas do not undermine this preferential position.

Information Technology

Dr. Bray asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of his departmental expenditure on information technology research and development projects was applied for, approved, and spent, respectively, in 1983-84, and so far in 1984-85; and what effect he expects the moratorium on new applications announced on 12 November 1984 to have on expenditure in the rest of 1984-85, and in 1985-86.

Mr. Pattie: Department of Trade and Industry expenditure on projects in those areas directly concerned with information technology research and development (including computing, telecommunications, consumer electronics, cable systems, capital electronics, office systems, microelectronics, fibre optics, the Alvey programme, and the use of IT in manufacturing) is as follows:

	1983-84	*1984-85 (to date)*
	£ million	*£ million*
Applied for	449·930	101·359
Approved	214·342	149·622
Spent	100·735	57·273

NB. these figures are subject to time lags between application, approval and expenditure. They exclude space R&D and such IT initiatives as micros in schools, ITECs.

The moratorium on new applications announced on 12 November will have no effect on expenditure in the rest of 1984-85, which is already fully committed to approved projects. As announced earlier, most of the 1985-86 allocation has already been committed. The extent to which there will be further expenditure in 1985-86 on applications received after the moratorium ends will depend on the outcome of the review now being undertaken.

Coal Imports

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list by volume, the coal imports to the United Kingdom for each month since January 1984 from Poland, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, West Germany, France, Belgium, Australia and South Africa.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to the reply*, 13 November 1984, c. *179*]: Information about the volumes of coal which have been imported into the United Kingdom is provided in *Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom*, which is available in the Library.

Johnson Group Cleaners (Merseyside)

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the proposed takeover bid by Nottingham Manufacturing Company for Johnson Group Cleaners (Merseyside); and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 November 1984, c. *243*]: Representations made to the Secretary of State regarding proposed mergers are confidential.

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will refer the takeover bid by Nottingham Manufacturing Co. from Johnson Group Cleaners (Merseyside) to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission;

(2) if he will refer to the Office of Fair Trading the takeover bid for the Johnson Group Cleaners (Merseyside) by the Nottingham Manufacturing Company.

Mr. Fletcher [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 November 1984, c. *243*]: My right hon. Friend announced today that he had decided, in accordance with the advice of the Director-General of Fair Trading, not to refer this proposed merger to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Multicultural Education

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the reservation on the Council of Europe recommendation on training of teachers for a multicultural society put forward by the United Kingdom Government at the 46th session of the Council represents a change in his Department's policy on multicutural education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: No. The Government's reservation on the Council of Europe recommendation on "The training of teachers in education for intercultural understanding, notably in a context of migration" was consistent with existing Government policy. My right hon. Friend is looking to the committee of inquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups, chaired by Lord Swann, for further advice on this area of policy. The committee's report is expected shortly.

Teacher Training

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether it is his Department's policy that the initial and in-service training of teachers should include an awareness of the economic, social, political and historical causes and effects of migration.

Mr. Dunn: Teachers and intending teachers should have an understanding of the nature of British society and are therefore likely to need an appreciation of the impact on it of migration. The time available within initial teacher training courses is however limited and may not allow for detailed consideration of a complex question. It is for local education authorities to consider the priority which should be attached to in-service provision in this area, in the light of the overall training needs of their teachers.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether it is his Department's policy that the multicultural dimension should be an integral feature of teacher training.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales have issued criteria for the approval of initial teacher training course which require that intending teachers should be prepared to teach the full range of pupils whom they are likely to encounter in an ordinary school, to respond flexibly to their diversity of ability, behaviour, social background and ethnic and cultural origins, and to guard against preconceptions based on the race or sex of pupils. Intending teachers will also need to have a basic understanding of the ethnic diversity of the society in which their pupils are growing up.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science why the Government put forward a reservation to the Council of Euorpe recommendation on training teachers for a multicore society at the 46th session of the Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The Government put down a reservation on the Council of Europe's recommendation on "The training of teachers in education for intercultural understanding, notably in a context of migration" because, for the reasons stated in the reservation, experience of responding to ethnic diversity in the United Kingdom led them to believe that the full recommendaion was not directly applicable in this country. I am sending the hon. Member the full text of the United Kingdom reservation.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether it is his Department's policy that teacher training preparation should include preparation for teaching host languages more effectively, and give student teachers the opportunity of learning the basis of one or more minority language.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales have issued criteria for the approval of initial teacher training courses which require that intending teachers should appreciate the importance for the learning process of the exchange of language between teacher and pupil, and that initial training courses for primary teachers should devote a substantial amount of time to the study of teaching language. Whilst teachers need also to be able to respond to the ethnic and cultural diversity of their pupils, there may not be time available in training courses to provide instruction in a minority language.

Libyan Students

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many Libyan students are enrolled in British universities and polytechnics at the present time; and who sponsors them.

Mr. Brooke: In 1983-84, the latest year for which information is available, 402 students domiciled in Libya attended full-time and sandwich courses in universities in Great Britain. The comparable figure for polytechnics was 75.

I understand that no Libyan students have, in recent years, benefited from any of the various scholarship and award schemes by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Overseas Development Administration or the British Council. One Libyan student holds an award under the overseas research student awards scheme.

Scottish Universities

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish figures for the academic years 1982-83 and 1983-84 to show *(a)* the total number of full-time students at each Scottish university and *(b)* the number of full-time staff at each university, giving the student-staff ratio in each case.

Mr. Brooke: The available information is as follows:

(1) Universities	(2) Full-time and sandwich students	(3) Full-time equivalent student load	(4) Full-time staff paid wholly from university funds	(5) Student/staff ratio (3-4)
1982-83				
Aberdeen	5,498	5,558	608	9·1
Dundee	3,294	3,303	380	8·7
Edinburgh	9,791	10,347	1,063	9·7
Glasgow	9,986	10,752	1,054	10·2
Heriot-Watt	3,284	3,088	265	11·7
St. Andrews	3,369	3,442	321	10·7
Stirling	2,608	2,743	246	11·2
Strathclyde	6,969	7,038	662	10·6
1983-84				
Aberdeen	5,470		583	
Dundee	3,198		346	
Edinburgh	9,866		1,087	
Glasgow	10,043	Not yet	1,025	Not yet
Heriot-Watt	3,185	available	271	available
St. Andrews	3,454		318	
Stirling	2,470		247	
Strathclyde	7,163		668	

Commonwealth Education Ministers (Conference Report)

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action is being taken by Her Majesty's Government in response to the report of the Commonwealth Education Ministers conference in Nicosia.

Mr. Brooke: The conference allowed for a valuable exchange of views on the three themes discussed, and in particular on that of student mobility within the Commonwealth, over which some differences of approach and practice emerged. The Government are considering the views expressed at the conference and note that there is to be a brief meeting of Commonwealth Education Ministers late next year either immediately before or after the UNESCO general conference, at which discussion can be taken further.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Dr. Alan Clift

Mr. Ashley asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland what advice was given by the Scottish Crown lawyers to Dr. Clift in the appeal in the case of John Preece about the style of the forensic report for the Scottish court and, in particular, about reference to the blood group of the murdered woman.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: Dr. Clift was given a report prepared in connection with another case to use as a style. No advice was given to him as to how he should deal in his report with the blood group of the murdered woman.

PRIME MINISTER

Wrexham

Q14. **Dr. Marek** asked the Prime Minister if she has any further plans to visit Wrexham.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

National Audit Office

Q18. **Mr. Michael Morris** asked the Prime Minister if she will introduce legislation to allow the National Audit Office access to the affairs and accounts of the nationalised industries.

The Prime Minister: I believe it is more appropriate for nationalised industries to be audited by commercial auditors.

Reddish

Q19. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Prime Minister if she will visit Reddish.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

UNESCO

Q36. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Prime Minister what is the cost of British membership of UNESCO.

The Prime Minister: The normal cost of membership of UNESCO is about £5 million per annum. The cost will be reduced in 1984 by refunds from previous years amounting to about £4·5 million, due to currency fluctuation.

Liverpool

Q110. **Mr. Heffer** asked the Prime Minister when she next intends to discuss with Liverpool city council the problems of the area; and what steps she is taking to bring down unemployment in the area.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to hold discussions with the city council. The Government are, of course, concerned about the level of unemployment in Liverpool. No other area in Great Britain receives such high levels of Government assistance. The creation of the Merseyside task force, the Merseyside development corporation, and more recently Britain's first international garden festival and its largest freeport testify to the Government's commitment to the area. But ultimately it is a healthy economy and competitive industry which will provide the new jobs we all want to see. Our policies are

directed to this end and we continue to look for ways of building on what has been achieved so far. In the meantime a substantial number of people in the area are benefiting from our special employment and training measures.

Human Rights

Mr. Terlezki asked the Prime Minister if she will call on the Soviet Union to set up a conference which would deal exclusively with human rights, under the terms set out in the Helsinki agreement.

The Prime Minister: Arrangements are already in hand for a meeting, within the Helsinki framework, to discuss human rights and fundamental freedoms. This will take place in Ottawa in May 1985 and will be attended by representatives of the 35 participating states of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe, including the Soviet Union. The mandate for the meeting is laid down in the concluding document of the Madrid review meeting (Cmnd. 9066). The United Kingdom intends to play its full part in the Ottawa discussions.

Engagements

Mr. Marlow asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 15 November.

Mr. Gould asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

Mr. Leigh asked the Prime Minister what are her official engagements for 15 November.

Mr. Shersby asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

Mr. Brinton asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

Mr. Stan Thorne asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 15 November.

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided over a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference

Mr. Key asked the Prime Minister what progress has been made in following up the intentions expressed in the communiqué issued at the end of the Commonwealth Heads of Government conference in New Delhi in 1983.

The Prime Minister: The Commonwealth Secretary-General has made good progress in following up the tasks entrusted to him by the Commonwealth Heads of Government at their conference in New Delhi in 1983. Among the specific decisions of that conference, the study which Commonwealth Heads of Government asked the Commonwealth Secretary-General to undertake into the special needs of small states is now in progress. A study group under the chairmanship of the Chief Justice of the Bahamas has been appointed and is expected to report its conclusions to the next Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. We have contributed ourselves to the study and will continue to give what support we can to its deliberations.

The Commonwealth consultative group on economic questions, appointed in accordance with the New Delhi statement on economic action, has already reported to Commonwealth Finance Ministers when they met in Toronto in September. The Commonwealth action group on Cyprus was convened, and lent its support to the initiatives now being taken by the United Nations Secretary-General.

We have given our support to the various conclusions reached in New Delhi on functional co-operation in the Commonwealth.

Progress in all these fields will be reviewed by the meeting of Commonwealth senior officials in Barbados in December 1984.

Commonwealth (Government Policy)

Mr. Key asked the Prime Minister how she ensures the co-ordination of Government policies towards the Commonwealth.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs is responsibile for ensuring the co-ordination of Government policies towards the Commonwealth.

Within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office one department has the specific task of ensuring that Commonwealth aspects are fully taken into account in the formulation of our overseas policies.

Cabinet Office Efficiency Unit

Mr. Onslow asked the Prime Minister what are the current terms of reference of the Cabinet Office efficiency unit.

The Prime Minister: Under the direction of Sir Robin Ibbs the efficiency unit advises me on the strategy for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Government services. I have particularly asked it to help Ministers set targets for improvements in value for money and to help them conduct efficiency scrutinies and other work to bring these improvements about. The unit works closely with the Cabinet Office and Her Majesty's Treasury.

USA (President)

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she has any plans to meet the President of the United States; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have congratulated President Reagan on his magnificent election victory. I hope to have an early opportunity to meet him again.

Public Limited Companies

Mr. Yeo asked the Prime Minister (1) if she will list the public limited companies in which Government shareholdings of 5 per cent. or more are held;

(2) what is the market value, where available, at the latest practicable date, of the Government shareholding in those public limited companies in which the Government hold an equity interest of more than 5 per cent.

The Prime Minister: Details of shares and other securities held as assets of the Consolidated Fund and National Loans Funds Accounts (1982-83 HC 158). Public limited companies in which the Government held a shareholding of 5 per cent. or more at 31 March 1984 are listed, together with a market valuation of the shareholding where this is appropriate using share prices at close of dealing on Monday 12 Novemeber.

Company	*Percentage of ordinary shares held by HMG*	*Valuation at share price on 12.11.84 (where appropriate)*
	per cent.	*£ million*
Cable and Wireless PLC	23·1	360
British Petroleum PLC	31·7	2,823
British Aerospace PLC	48·8	573
Britoil PLC	48·8	563
BL PLC	99·7	—
British Channel Tunnel PLC	100	—
British Nuclear Fuels PLC	100	—
British Airways PLC*	100	—

* Assets of British Airways Board were not vested in British Airways PLC until 1 April 1984

Overseas Development Association

Mr. Thurnham asked the Prime Minister what representations she has received about providing funds to the Overseas Development Administration by way of a temporary 1 per cent. levy on food sales in the United Kingdom for the remainder of the financial year 1984-85; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have received one such representation. Within the allocation for the aid programme, the Government are well able to respond swiftly and generously to the emergency situation in Ethiopia and other African countries.

Data Protection

Dr. Marek asked the Prime Minister (1) whether the code of practice, Cmnd. 9270, relating to data collected for statistical purposes, allows for any raw personal data collected for statistical survey to be passed to the police;

(2) whether the code of practice, Cmnd. 9270, relating to data collected for statistical purposes, allows for the data in statistical form to be passed to the police.

The Prime Minister: The conditions governing the transfer of statistical information to the police are the same as those for any organisation of bona fide researchers outside Government Departments. The code of practice provides for data about individuals to be transferred for statistical purposes where it has been safeguarded by being made anonymous. Information about identifiable individuals is not transferred except in very limited circumstances, which are clearly defined in the code.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Reform

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is able to make a statement about housing outside London for retired council tenants from the capital after the abolition of the Greater London council.

Sir George Young: We have already announced our intention that, if Parliament agrees to our proposals for the abolition of the Greater London council, the ownership of that council's seaside and country homes should pass to the district councils in whose areas they lie. We have also announced that there should be statutory arrangements to ensure that the great majority of the lettings remain available to London's elderly. Certain nomination rights to the transferred dwellings will therefore be formally vested under the abolition legislation in my right hon. Friend and there will be full consultation with the local authority associations concerned about the detailed arrangements to be adopted.

The financial basis of transfer will fairly reflect the benefits to be gained both by the councils in London and by the district councils. We intend that they should enable the district councils broadly to maintain on abolition the existing levels of rent and management and maintenance expenditure, although we do not guarantee to take on board any changes the GLC makes between now and 1986.

Further provision of homes for retired people will be a matter for the councils of the London boroughs, as the local housing authorities for the capital. The Government do, however, attach high priority to concentrating resources within the housing programme on capital provision for those in greatest housing need, including the elderly and the disabled. While boroughs may normally wish to build new homes for these groups within their own areas, we recognise that some may wish to exercise their powers to develop outside London, subject to my right hon. Friend's consent under section 21(3) of the London Government Act 1963.

My right hon. Friend has now decided that he will look sympathetically on applications by boroughs for such consent where they intend to provide dwellings exclusively for the use of the elderly or the disabled and where the prospective host authorities are content with the proposals. Once consent has been granted, my right hon. Friend would not expect subsequently to transfer to the district council ownership of whatever properties were developed within its terms, unless requested to do so under section 23 of the Act by the councils of both the district and the London borough concerned.

This announcement demonstrates our concern that the interests of the elderly and the disabled should not be affected by the abolition of the GLC. It confirms the priority we attach in housing programmes to provision for special needs groups, and our intention that the London boroughs should be able to continue the development of homes outside London for the retired and the disabled if they so wish. Some of the GLC's tenants have I know been worried that abolition would cause changes in their rents or the management expenditure on their estates. This statement shows that the terms of transfer will be designed so that rents and maintenance spending need not be affected on abolition, and will provide reassurance to those tenants who have expressed concern.

Urban Programme

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a detailed breakdown of the total urban programme for the financial years 1978-79 to 1984-85 (estimated); and if he will list the outturn urban programme grants paid to each partnership, programme and designated authority and the estimated figure for 1984-85, comparing for each authority the level of funding in each year with *(a)* housing subsidy received and *(b)* rate support grant before and after holdback.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: I have placed a copy of this information in the Library.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the reduction in real terms in the urban programme following the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The provision for the urban programme in England in 1985-86 will be £338 million. That is a cash reduction of £28 million below the planning figure set out in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1984-85 to 1986-87" (Cmnd. 9143), but that means that in 1985-86 the urban programme will be maintained at the same level in cash as the likely outturn for 1984-85. Adjusted by the GDP deflator this implies a cost reduction of some 4 per cent. but the effect on programme activity will depend on actual cost changes in the relevant areas.

Local Authorities (Spending Targets)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek powers to give local councils a single spending target.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Rateable Properties (Revaluation)

Mr. Terlezki asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for a general revaluation by the Inland Revenue of rateable properties.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on 22 October, at column 491.

Local Government Financing

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many external inquiries and internal inquiries have been undertaken into local govenment financing since 1954.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The only external inquiry into local government finance since 1954 was conducted by the Layfield committee, which reported in 1976. Within the Department internal inquiries into specific aspects of local government finance form a normal part of the process of policy appraisal and formulation.

Pollution (West Yorkshire)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements he proposes for the completion of plans required under section 2 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 in west Yorkshire in the event that the county council is abolished and responsibility for waste disposal matters is transferred to the district councils.

Mr. Patrick Jenkin: The Government intend that all aspects of waste regulation and disposal, including the completion of plans required under section 2 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974, should become the responsibility of the district councils in the event of the abolition of West Yorkshire county council.

The need for long-term planning of waste disposal over a sufficiently wide area was, however, one of the key criteria in the consultation document "Streamlining the Cities: Waste Disposal"—10 November 1983—and it is expected that the plans produced will reflect this.

Conservation Areas (Planning Associations)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to assist conservation areas where there is overwhelming opposition to further development and where the local authority cannot afford to pay compensation on refusal of planning permission.

Mr. Macfarlane: I refer to the answer given to my hon. Friend on 31 October.

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any evidence that conservation areas are better protected than other areas when local authorities consider planning applications under the 10 per cent. rule.

Mr. Macfarlane: I have no reason to believe that local planning authorities fail to take material considerations into account when dealing with planning applications affecting conservation areas, whether there is a liability to pay compensation following refusal or not.

Town and Country Planning Act 1971

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how long reform of section 169 and schedule 8 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 have been under active consideration; and what difficulties lie in the way of a conclusion.

Mr. Macfarlane: The matter has been under consideration since the judgment of the Court of Appeal in Camden London Borough v. Peaktop Properties (Hampstead) Ltd. in May 1983. It has been necessary to consider carefully whether an amendment of the compensation provisions would amount to an unacceptable curtailment of rights of property.

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of his officials are engaged full time in consideration of proposals to reform section 169 and schedule 8 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971.

Mr. Macfarlane: None full time. Consideration of proposals of the kind mentioned is part of the normal work of the Department.

Planning Applications (Compensation)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he knows of any instances in which a decision to refuse planning permission and uphold an appeal to his Department has subsequently been abandoned because of compensation liability under the 10 per cent. rule.

Mr. Macfarlane: I cannot answer for decisions of this kind taken by local planning authorities.

General Development Order

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in the light of his Department's paper on the general development order, he will make a statement on the requirement to obtain planning permission for any structure required for the keeping of horses and other animals on land of less than five acres.

Mr. Macfarlane: The proposal canvassed in my Department's consultation paper, issued in January, to which my hon. Friend refers, involved a suggestion that "permitted development" rights be introduced into the Town and Country Planning General Development Order for the use of up to two hectares of land for keeping horses for recreational purposes, but not for the erection of buildings. As at present, the erection of buildings specifically for this purpose would normally require planning permission. There has been a wide variety of responses to this and other proposals in the consultation paper, and my right hon. Friend will be glad to consider any comments on this proposal which my hon. Friend may wish to make.

District Councils (Expenditure)

Mr. Walters asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he intends taking to enable district councils to spend a higher proportion of their capital receipts on capital projects of their own choice.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend has announced his intention of discussing with the local authority associations ways in which the control of local authority capital expenditure can be improved. Any representations which the associations may wish to make in the course of those discussions about the use of capital receipts will be carefully considered.

Tyne and Wear County Council

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he proposes to take in the event of the abolition of Tyne and Wear county council to provide financial assistance to the industry and employment programme of the metropolitan boroughs in the Tyne and Wear area.

Mr. Waldegrave: Metropolitan district councils taking over services currently the responsibility of the Tyne and Wear metropolitan county council will have allocated to them grant related expenditure appropriate to the needs to be met by those services. It will be for the districts to decide on any arrangements for continuing support for the council county industry and employment programme.

Cambridge Science Park

Mr. Rhodes James asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to announce his decision on the planning application now before him for the proposed new Cambridge science park submitted by St. John's college, Cambridge.

Mr. Macfarlane: The case raises some complex and difficult issues, but it will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

South Bank

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what approaches have been made to the Greater London council regarding ownership of the South Bank.

Mr. Waldegrave: A request for such information was made to the Greater London council in a letter dated 21 August sent by the Treasury Solicitor's Department acting on behalf of the Office of Arts and Libraries. The request was acknowledged, but the information requested has not so far been supplied.

Planning Inquiries (Guidance)

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance is given to inspectors hearing public inquiries about matters involving public access to land about the extent to which the inquiry should consider or hear evidence about claims to the ownership of the land in question.

Mr. Macfarlane: I understand that this question relates to the public inquiry held in 1982 concerning Maltby common. Prior to the inquiry the inspector was advised that the Secretary of State had satisfied himself on the ownership question and that the terms of reference did not extend to this issue. However, at the opening of the inquiry, this ruling was challenged by some of the objectors who argued that the ownership issue be investigated fully at the inquiry. The inspector responded that the inquiry could not be a forum for a detailed investigation of title to the land, but that in all the circumstances he was prepared to hear legal submissions as to whether the Secretry of State had jurisdiction to make the order, which was the subject of the inquiry. The inspector's decision was accepted by all the parties, and submissions by the parties on the ownership issue were made at the inquiry.

Yorkshire Water Authority (Disconnections)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many domestic customers in Leeds metropolitan district council have had their water supply cut off by the Yorkshire water authority since January 1984.

Mr. Macfarlane: In the period 1 January 1984 to 14 November 1984 the Yorkshire water authority cut off the water supply to four domestic consumers for non-payment of bills. In the same period two of these consumers were subsequently reconnected.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Labelling

Mr. Coombs asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list those organisations and individuals involved in all formal or informal discussions on improved food labelling which he is conducting at present and has conducted in the last 12 months;

(2) if he is holding any informal discussions with representatives of the food industry about improved

labelling on the nutritional value of food; and whether there is any medical or consumer input to these discussions;

(3) which consumer organisations he has asked to conduct research into aspects of food labelling; and when he expects the results of this research to be available;

(4) when he intends to announce his proposals for the labelling of foods with information on their nutritional value, in line with the recommendations of the COMA report;

(5) with which consumer organisations he is holding discussions on food labelling, following the publication of the COMA report.

Mrs. Fenner: Over the last 12 months my Department has had many contacts and discussions on improved food labelling. These have been with representatives of trade associations, consumer interests, enforcement authorities, commercial companies or private individuals, and cover both formal meetings, ad hoc contacts and exchanges of correspondence. Currently my Department and the Department of Health and Social Security are holding informal discussions with representatives of the food industry about the practicalities of fat content labelling of food. These discussions are covering the fat content labelling recommendations of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy panel report on diet and cardiovascular disease, and also, at the request of industry, nutrition labelling. A medical adviser from the Department of Health and Social Security attends the meetings. My officials are also maintaining contact with consumer interests on developments arising from the COMA panel report, and their views are taken into account in discussions with industry. In collaboration with the Consumers Association and the National Consumer Council my Department has initiated a study on consumer attitudes to and understanding of fat content and nutrition labelling, with the results expected in spring 1985.

We are still considering the Government's response to the COMA panel report's recommendations on food labelling. These recommendations are far-reaching in their effects but I hope to be able to make an announcement within the next three months.

National Soil Survey

Mr. Beith asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether it is his intention to continue financing the work necessary to enable the national soil survey on the 1 to 50,000 scale to be completed.

Mrs. Fenner: We are considering our funding of the work of the soil survey of England and Wales—£1·9 million in 1983-84—following my Ministry's recent review of commissioned research and development in soil science.

The Survey is a part of the Agriculture and Food Research Council organisation. We shall be considering the views of the Council and also consulting the new Priorities Board for Research and Development in Agriculture and Food about the future of the Survey. Until we have considered these views I am unable to comment on the future financing of the national survey on the 1 to 50,000 scale.

EC Wine Production

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what limits exist on European Economic Community wine production; and what changes are anticipated to prepare the wine market for the admission of Spain and Portugal.

Mrs. Fenner: Since 1980 there has been a Community ban on new planting of vineyards producing non-quality wine. In addition, provision exists for the compulsory disillation of surplus wine.

These arrangements have failed to balance supply and demand and the Commission has recently proposed further measures, which are still under discussion, both to reduce substantially the area under vines and to deter over-production. If adopted they would apply to Spain and Portugal after accession but the Commission has also proposed specific programmes to reduce the area under vines in those countries.

Butter

Mr. Latham asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much butter which would otherwise have been sold under normal market conditions he anticipates will go into intervention, having been displaced from the market by the special European Community scheme for cheaper butter at Christmas; and what will be the cost to the United Kingdom taxpayers of this substitution.

Mr. Jopling: Butter sold under the EEC special sale scheme will tend to displace fresh butter which would otherwise have been sold on the market. This is one of the reasons why we opposed this scheme. However, the displacement of normal sales will not necessarily be fully reflected in sales into intervention in the United Kingdom. This is partly because sales of imported butter may well decline and imports be reduced and partly because lower prices for butter may encourage consumption of butter at the expense of alternative fats. It is not possible to provide estimates of the consequences of these effects which will depend on the reactions of consumers to the availability of the special sale butter and of traders and others involved in the production and marketing of butter.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Black Economy

4. **Mr. Shersby** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has for collecting the revenue that is lost to the Exchequer as a result of the growth of the black economy.

Mr. Peter Rees: By the end of this tax year we will have increased the number of Inland Revenue staff on investigation work by almost 700 since we came to power in 1979. We plan to deploy a further 1,000 by April 1988.

Value Added Tax

18. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he intends to extend value added tax to any items currently zero rated during the current parliamentary Session; and if he will make a statement.

28. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement as to the Government's

intention with regard to any extension of value added tax to cover commercial construction contracts, animal feeding stuffs, newspaper advertisements, children's shoes and generally.

34. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has plans to put value added tax on children's shoes.

26. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans to extend value added tax to the supply of newspaper and educational materials, including books, and books generally.

Mr. Hayhoe: Although the Government are committed to a shift in the burden of taxation from taxes on earnings to taxes on spending, we have no set views at present on how this might best be done.

Inflation

19. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of inflation.

Mr. Peter Rees: Over the 12 months to September 1984, the retail prices index increased by 4·7 per cent. As my right hon. Friend said in his autumn statement this week, the rate of increase in retail prices should be around 4¾ per cent. in the last quarter of this year, and is expected to fall to around 4½ per cent. by the end of next year.

Job Creation

20. **Mr. Knox** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new fiscal and monetary measures he plans to achieve a higher level of employment.

Mr. Peter Rees: Employment is already rising, but, as I have made clear before, more substantial progress depends less on action by Government than on a wider acceptance of more realistic attitudes to pay.

Average Wage

21. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average wage at the latest available date; how this compares in real terms with that of 1975 and 1978; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Rees: According to the Department of Employment's "New Earnings Survey," average gross weekly earnings were £159·3 in April 1984. This figure is for full-time employees on adult rates whose pay was not affected by absence. In real terms, this is an increase of 9 per cent. since April 1975, and of 12½ per cent. since April 1978.

Pound Coin

22. **Mr. Janner** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will redesign the pound coin.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Policy on the £1 coin was announced in the autumn statement earlier this week.

Taxes Act

23. **Mr. Stern** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to seek to introduce into the Taxes Acts a statutory definition of employment.

Mr. Moore: We have no plans to introduce a special definition for tax purposes. Employment status is a matter of general law with wide implications beyond tax extending, for example, to national insurance contributions and benefits, employment protection and health and safety at work. The existing criteria laid down by the courts seek essentially to answer the question: is the individual in business on his own account? We believe that this is the right approach. To introduce a special definition for tax in place of existing law would only complicate matters and introduce fresh doubts. Where uncertainty now exists, inspectors of taxes are always willing to advise. The Inland Revenue will also shortly be publishing a leaflet explaining the detailed criteria adopted by the courts to help taxpayers understand the issues involved.

Company Profitability

24. **Mr. Tracey** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the trend of company profitability.

Mr. Peter Rees: The real rate of return for all non-North sea industrial and commercial companies increased from 3·4 per cent. in 1981 to 5·8 per cent. in 1983. Profits have continued to increase in 1984, suggesting that the upward trend is continuing.

Children's Shoes (VAT)

25. **Mr. Michael Morris** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had asserting the importance of children's shoes being zero-rated for value added tax.

Mr. Moore: Treasury Ministers have received some 160 letters.

27. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated yield from an extension of value added tax at current rates to children's shoes.

Mr. Hayhoe: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave today to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood).

World Debt

29. **Mr. Skinner** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussion he has had with other Finance Ministers regarding the world debt crisis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Rees: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer discussed international debt at the recent annual meetings of Commonwealth Finance Ministers, the IMF and the IBRD.

Taxation

30. **Mr. Pike** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he proposes to take to reduce the taxation burden on those on average earnings or less.

Mr. Moore: We hope to be able to make further increases in the real value of personal allowances—which concentrates relief on those at average earnings or less—as and when economic circumstances permit.

Capital Transfer Tax

31. **Mr. Maude** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost of collecting capital transfer tax in each of the last three years.

Mr. Moore: The estimated cost of collecting capital transfer tax and estate duty is as follows:

	£ million
1981-82	15·7
1982-83	16·2
1983-84	17·1

The cost of collecting capital transfer tax alone is not available.

Oil Revenues

32. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the proportion of Her Majesty's Government's oil revenues expended in Scotland.

Mr. Peter Rees: Individual sources of revenue are not allocated to particular kinds of expenditure; there is no administrative relationship between oil revenues and expenditure in Scotland.

Economic Growth

33. **Mr. Forman** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is satisfied with the rate of growth of national output.

Mr. Peter Rees: Yes. Between the second quarter of 1983 and 1984 GDP, on the average measure grew by 3 per cent. For 1984 as a whole GDP is expected to be 4 per cent. above the pre-recession peak year of 1979. GDP is expected to grow by 3½ per cent. in 1985.

Employment Forecast

35. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the forecast level of unemployment for November 1985.

Mr. Hayhoe: In recent years Governments have not provided forecasts of unemployment. Progress on jobs will depend crucially on realistic pay settlements.

Sterling-Dollar Exchange Rate

36. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is satisfied that the current value of sterling against the dollar reflects the genuine value of British exports to the United States of America.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The strength of the dollar against all currencies reflects the response of competitive market forces to a number of factors including high United States interest rates.

Coal Industry Dispute

37. **Mr. Strang** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the cost of the industrial dispute in the coal industry.

Mr. Peter Rees: If the strike were to end at Christmas, it would add some £1·5 billion to the PSBR for 1984-85. The public expenditure planning total would be exceeded by about the same amount.

Monetary Targets

38. **Mr. Gould** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he intends to change his monetary targets.

Mr. Peter Rees: We have at present no plans to do so.

Export (Control) Order (Infringements)

39. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of instances of compoundings on administrative settlements as a result of infringements of the Export (Control) Order relating to the export of high technology electronic items and associated goods since 1978.

Mr. Hayhoe: Customs and Excise has compounded proceedings for offences arising out of infringements of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1981 on 99 occasions since 1978. Information is not available about the number of these which relate to high technology electronic items.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

40. **Mr. Maples** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his most recent estimate for the current year's public sector borrowing requirement.

Mr. Peter Rees: £8½ billion, as published in the autumn statement.

WALES

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Wales what information his Department has on the incidence of cervical cancer in Wales in the past three years.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The numbers of new registrations of cervical cancer (ICD Code 180) in Welsh residents were as follows:

	Numbers
1980	334
1981	343
1982	247

The figure for 1982 under-represents the true position of those registrations, normally obtained from the hospital activity analysis system, which were not recorded in 1982 because of industrial action.

Dairy Industry

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied with the present state of the dairy industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The dairy industry in Wales is passing through a difficult period as a result of the long dry summer and the introduction of the milk quota scheme. However, the measures we have introduced, including the reserve for special cases and the outgoers scheme, will help to ameliorate the effects of quotas on those most harshly affected and the industry will have a sounder base from which to plan for the future. In addition, the aid to small milk producers scheme is being continued for a further two years and many dairy producers will benefit from the extension of the less favoured areas.

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has regarding the current levels of milk production in Ireland, France and Germany; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The latest published information on deliveries of cows milk to dairies in Ireland, France and Germany is shown in the following table. The figures exclude on-farm use, use for animal feed and in general use for direct sales. The data are provisional and are therefors subject to amendment.

Table: Cows Milk Delivered to Dairies, 1984
'000 tonnes

	April	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*
Ireland	638·30	835·50	773·70	694·74	592·40
France	2,515·40	2,844·10	2,561·40	2,295·60	1,966·10
Germany	2,303·70	2,446·99	2,185·60	2,108·06	1,936·00

Source: Eurostat.

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he has now received a comprehensive report from the European Economic Community regarding the application of the quota system for milk in other member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. McQuarrie) on 14 November 1984, at columns 295-96.

Sir Raymond Gower asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many dairy farmers in Wales and in the Vale of Glamorgan, respectively, have applied under the outgoers scheme; how many in each case have been rejected; and what further consideration may be possible in cases which were rejected.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: There were 728 applications under the current milk outgoers scheme in Wales, of which 12 were in the district of the Vale of Glamorgan.

No dairy producer who made a valid application within the terms of the scheme has yet been rejected. Offers have so far been made to applicants with individual quotas of up to 250,000 litres (but excluding those in which milk production accounted for only a small proportion of the farm business). Further offers are likely to be made to progressively larger producers as some of those provisionally accepted withdraw their applications or are found not to be fully eligible to participate.

Agricultural Grants

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if, following the autumn statement, he will list the consequences in financial terms of the cutback in agricultural grants in Wales in 1984-85 and 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: There are no reductions in the provision for 1984-85 as a result of the autumn statement. Following the changes announced in that statement the planned expenditure on agriculture in 1985-86 for which I am responsible shows a net reduction of £17 million. This net figure results from increases and decreases in a number of areas, but the largest element is a net reduction of some £16 million in the forecast demand for schemes pre-funded by the European Community.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate the amount of cash cuts in his allocation for 1984-85 and 1985-86 for *(a)* local authority housing and *(b)* urban aid consequent upon the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: There are no cash cuts in 1984-85 as a consequence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement. I have not yet decided on the allocation to particular services, including local authority housing and urban aid, for 1985-86. I shall make my decisions known in due course.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) in what areas of his Department's spending programme he has used his discretion to make allocations of the overall expenditure allocated to his Department which take account of local factors as set out in paragraph 2.24 of the autumn statement; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what are the outline public expenditure plans for Wales for 1985-86; and if he will publish details in the *Official Report* under each expenditure head in a form comparable with that in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement indicating spending plans in Wales on agriculture, forestry commission, trade and industry, energy, employment, transport, housing, the urban programme, education and science, arts and libraries, health, personal social services and other areas for which he has responsibility, respectively.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The latest outline public expenditure plans for services within my responsibility will be found in table 2.16 of the 1984 public expenditure White Paper, Cmnd. 9143. I am now reviewing those plans following the autumn statement. My decisions will be published in the form of revised plans in the 1985 public expenditure White Paper.

EMPLOYMENT

Long-term Unemployment

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his new initiatives to reduce long-term unemployment.

Mr. Alan Clark: The only way permanently to reduce long-term unemployment is to maintain the Government's

economic policies, which are the best guarantee of sustainable growth in output and jobs. My right hon. Friend described the latest developments in the Government's employment and training measures on 12 November, at column 444.

Wages Inspectors (Inspections)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish, for the most recent year available, information on the numbers and proportions of inspections in Scotland by wages inspectors, the number of workers whose pay was examined, and the percentage found to be underpaid, the number of workers paid arrears, and the total amount of arrears paid, dividing the numbers and proportions into *(a)* those which included a visit to the establishment and *(b)* those which were carried out by post.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The pay of workers at 5,294 establishments in Scotland covered by wages councils was checked by wages inspectors in 1983. This represents 13·7 per cent. of the number on the Wages Inspectorate's register. Details of the checks and the outcome are given in the following table.

	Pay checks involving a visit	*Pay checks not involving a visit*		*Total*
		Postal	*Other*	
Establishments checked	2,939 (56 per cent.)	493 (9 per cent.)	1,862 (35 per cent.)	5,294
Workers whose pay checked	16,920 (52 per cent.)	1,885 (6 per cent.)	13,450 (42 per cent.)	32,255

The figures for postal and other checks not involving a visit relate only to establishments where the check proved satisfactory.

	Figures
Percentage of workers found to be underpaid following a visit	11·6 per cent.
Percentage of workers found to be underpaid as a result of all checks	6·1 per cent.
Workers for whom arrears assessed	1,959
Amount of arrears assessed	£217,317
Workers to whom arrears paid	1,767
Amount of arrears paid	£179,777

A detailed explanation of the inspectorate's method of checking pay and the results in 1983 is given in pages 451 and 452 of the October 1984 issue of *Employment Gazette*, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the latest unemployment figures.

Mr. Alan Clark: At 11 October the number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom was 3,225,000.

The Government are concerned about the level of unemployment, and some 689,000 people are currently benefiting from our employment and training measures. However, sustainable employment depends on a healthy economy, competitive industry and a more flexible labour market. Our policies are directed to those ends and we continue to look for ways of building on what has been achieved so far.

One important influence on firms' competitiveness is the level of wages, and the Government believe that moderating the growth in real earnings will have a significant impact on unemployment.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide the most recent figures for unemployment in the Leeds district by postcode areas; how many of these were women; and by how much each figure has changed in the last 12 months.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is not available in the form requested except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the increase in the number of unemployed people since May 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 11 October 1984 the number of unemployed people (including school leavers) in the United Kingdom was 3,225,136, an estimated increase of 2,006,200 claimants since May 1979. The figures are affected by the 1983 Budget provisions which enable some men, mainly aged 60 and over, to receive the long-term rate of supplementary benefit and national insurance credits without having to sign on at an unemployment benefit office. Between April and August 1983 an estimated 161,800 men were affected.

Skillcentres

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Employment if a decision has been made to close any Manpower Services Commission sponsored skillcentres.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Manpower Services Commission decided in January this year that it would review the agency's progress towards full cost recovery in the autumn. The commission will discuss this review in December.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Employment what budgets have been set for the skillcentre training agency (training division) of the Manpower Services Commission for *(a)* 1984-85 and *(b)* 1985-86.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The skillcentre training agency trading account budget for 1984-85 is:

	Millions
	£
Expenditure	102·8
Receipts	78·5

Provision has been made to meet a trading account deficit of up to £24 million from the Manpower Service Commission's grant-in-aid.

The agency's budget for 1985-86 has not yet been agreed, but provision will be made to meet a trading account deficit of up to £12 million from the commission's grant-in-aid.

Youth Training (Leeds)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the numbers on youth training schemes in the Leeds area on 1 November and break down by ethnic origin those accepted on such schemes in the last 12 months.

Mr. Peter Morrison: On 1 November 1984 there were 4,148 young people in training on the youth training scheme in the Leeds local authority district.

The following table shows the number of entrants by ethnic origin from 2 November 1983 to 1 November 1984.

Ethnic Origin	*Entrants 2 November 83 to 1 November 84*
White/European	5,110
African/West Indian	195
Asian	84
Others	34
Total	5,423

Earnings

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the figures for hourly earnings of *(a)* manual and *(b)* all workers in the motor vehicle and components industry compared to (i) all workers and (ii) manufacturing workers for each year since 1970.

Mr. Alan Clark: The following table sets out the available information on the average hourly earnings of full-time adult male employees working a full week based on the "New Earnings Survey" in April of each successive year since 1970.

*Average gross hourly earnings**

Pence per hour

	Motor vehicle industry		*All employees in*	
	Manual employees	*All employees*	*Manufacturing industries*	*All industries and services*
1970†	74·5	77·7	67·3	66·2
1971†	84·1	87·5	75·4	74·4
1972†	92·7	97·3	83·7	83·1
1973	104·7	110·1	94·5	94·3
1974	113·6	120·1	106·9	107·6
1975	138·2	146·0	137·7	139·9
1976	163·3	170·4	163·2	166·8
1977	175·3	183·5	177·7	181·1
1978	199·8	209·0	202·9	204·3
1979	226·9	237·7	233·1	232·2
1980	265·5	283·8	284·1	288·2
1981	287·7	312·8	323·5	332·0
1982	‡320·9	349·0	357·0	365·6
	‖322·2	349·6	354·2	365·6
1983	¶362·8	394·9	383·0	399·1
	•362·2	393·6	378·1	392·6
1984	387·6	425·4	409·9	423·9

* Including overtime earnings. Employees without normal basic hours as reported in the survey are omitted from the calculations.

† The figures for 1972 and earlier years differ slightly from those for later years by including some employees who were not working a full week.

‡ Figures for this and earlier periods are based on the 1968 Standard Industrial Classification: Motor vehicle industry equals minimum list heading 381; Manufacturing industries equal Orders III to XIX.

‖ Figures for this and later periods are based on the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification: Motor vehicle industry equals Class 35; Manufacturing industries equal Divisions 2 to 4.

¶ Figures for this and earlier periods relate to males aged 21 and over.

• Figures for this and later periods relate males on adult rates.

Training and Employment

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Employment what are the current, future, projected and previous numbers of participants in total and by region in the various training and employment measures run by the Manpower Services Commission.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 9 November 1984, c. 27]: The figures for each scheme are given in the following tables. Current participants are given for the latest available date.

Programme: Priority skills national grants

Financial year	**Great Britain*
1975-76	27,200
1976-77	39,800
1977-78	37,600
1978-79	36,500
1979-80	22,200
1980-81	25,600
1981-82	28,600
1982-83	21,900
1983-84	17,500
September 1984	1,700
1984-85	11,000

* Regions: Scotland; Northern; Yorkshire and Humberside; North West; Midlands; Wales; South West; South East; London.

Notes:

1. National grants—regional breakdown not available.
2. Up to and including 1978-79, programme was known as 'Special Measures'.
3. Between 1979/80 and 1982-83, programme was known as 'Training for Skills'.
4. Figures for September 1984 represent numbers currently supported.
5. Figures for 1984-85 relate to the planned number of starts.
6. Figures have been rounded to the nearest one hundred.

Programme: Community Programme (CP)

	Financial Year			
	1982-83	*1983-84*	*September 1984*	*1984-85*
Scotland	2,600	18,900	15,800	21,000
Northern	500	13,300	13,400	18,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,100	15,000	14,300	18,000
North West	700	22,100	20,600	25,000
Midlands	2,600	26,400	23,400	27,000
Wales	1,300	11,500	8,800	13,000

	Financial Year			
	1982-83	*1983-84*	*September 1984*	*1984-85*
South West	700	7,100	7,500	9,000
South East	1,100	12,400	10,800	16,000
London	600	7,700	8,800	13,000
GREAT BRITAIN	12,100	134,400	123,000	160,000

Notes:
(1) Figures relate to numbers entering the programme, except those relating to September 1984, which are currently filled places.
(2) Figures for 1984-85 relate to the planned number to enter the Schemes in that year.
(3) Figures in each column have been rounded to the nearest one hundred.

Programme: Youth Training Scheme (YTS)

	Financial Year		
	1983-84	*September 1984*	*1984-85*
Scotland	38,800	31,300	42,400
Northern	25,900	21,900	27,100
Yorkshire and Humberside	35,800	32,300	40,300
North West	54,100	48,200	59,200
Midlands	72,500	64,800	82,800
Wales	21,700	18,600	23,500
South West	26,200	22,900	31,200
South East	57,000	48,600	68,700
London	21,900	18,600	29,400
GREAT BRITAIN	354,000	307,200	404,000

Notes:
(1) Figures for 1983-84 relate to numbers entering the scheme.
(2) The figure for September 1984 represents the number in training on that date.
(3) Figures for 1984-85 relate to the planned number to enter the scheme in that year.
(4) Figures in each column have been rounded to the nearest one hundred.

Programme: Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS)

	Financial Year		
	1983-84	*October 1984*	*1984-85*
Scotland	2,200	3,200	4,000
Northern	1,600	2,200	3,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,600	3,700	4,500
North West	5,200	7,700	10,300
Midlands	5,000	6,800	8,600
Wales	1,900	2,500	3,000
South West	2,200	3,100	4,000
South East	4,400	6,000	8,000
London	2,600	3,800	4,700
GREAT BRITAIN	27,000	39,100	50,100

Notes:
(1) Figures for 1983-84 show the number participating under the National Scheme in that year.
(2) Figures at October 1984 show the number participating at that date.
(3) Figures for 1984-85 show the number expected to participate in that year.
(4) Figures in each column have been rounded to the nearest one hundred.

Programme: Training Opportunities Programme (TOPS)

	Financial year													
	1972-73	*1973-74*	*1974-75*	*1975-76*	*1976-77*	*1977-78*	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*August 1984*	*1984-85*
Scotland					10,800	11,500	9,000	9,200	8,500	8,000	7,200	8,300	2,000	9,600
Northern							5,200	5,700	5,200	4,300	4,300	4,500	1,000	7,500
Yorkshire and Humberside					12,000	14,300	5,200	6,000	5,100	4,700	5,500	6,100	1,500	7,200
North West					15,000	16,300	11,400	12,000	9,800	9,200	9,600	10,900	2,400	13,200
Midlands					14,900	15,100	9,000	9,600	8,500	8,400	7,900	9,400	2,600	11,400
Wales							4,200	4,300	4,200	3,900	3,200	3,500	1,100	4,800
South West					13,000	14,100	4,400	4,800	4,700	4,300	4,500	5,200	1,400	5,700
South East					12,900	14,300	10,700	11,300	10,000	9,600	9,400	9,800	2,600	13,500
London					12,700	13,400	11,200	11,700	10,400	9,100	7,700	8,500	2,200	11,700
Great Britain	32,700	41,400	49,600	64,600	91,400	99,000	70,200	74,500	66,400	61,400	59,300	66,200	16,200	85,600

Notes:
1. All figures except for August 1984 are for individuals completing training.
2. Figures in each column have been rounded to the nearest one hundred.
3. Regional breakdown for years 1972-73 to 1975-76 could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.
4. Figures for 1976-77 and 1977-78 include young people trained under TOPS.
5. Figures for 1976-77 have been estimates using a breakdown by regions which was available for the 1976 calendar year.
6. The figure for August 1974 represents the number in training at that date.
7. The figure for 1984-85 represents the planned number to complete training in that year.
8. Total for 1984-85 includes 1,000 starts at residential training centres which cannot be allocated to region.

Programme: Open Tech Programme

	1983-84	*1984-85*
Great Britain*	6,000	25,000

* Regions: Scotland; Northern; Yorkshire and Humberside; North West; Midlands; Wales; South West; South East; London.
Notes:
(1) Regional breakdown not available.
(2) Current participants figures are not available until April 1985.
(3) Figures for 1984-85 relate to planned provision.
(4) Figures have been rounded.

Programme: Employment Rehabilitation

	Financial Year										
	1974-75	*1975-76*	*1976-77*	*1977-78*	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*October 1984*	*1984-85*
Scotland	—	—	—	2,000	2,200	2,200	2,200	2,200	2,200	2,300	150	2,300
Northern	—	—	—	1,500	1,500	1,400	1,600	1,500	1,500	1,500	100	1,500

	Financial Year											
	1974-75	1975-76	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	October 1984	1984-85
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	—	—	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	1,900	2,000	2,200	160	2,100
North West	—	—	—	1,700	1,500	2,300	2,200	2,100	2,100	2,100	150	2,000
Midlands	—	—	—	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,200	2,500	2,400	2,700	190	2,700
Wales	—	—	—	1,000	1,100	1,100	1,100	1,100	1,100	1,200	70	1,000
South West	—	—	—	500	1,200	1,100	1,100	1,100	1,200	1,200	90	1,200
South East	—	—	—	1,000	1,000	1,000	900	900	800	900	80	900
London	—	—	—	2,200	2,200	2,000	1,800	1,500	1,700	1,800	120	1,700
GREAT BRITAIN	12,200	13,800	15,000	14,900	15,700	16,100	16,100	14,800	15,000	15,800	1,100	15,400

Notes:
(1) Regional breakdown from 1974-75 to 1976-77 not available.
(2) Financial year figures relate to people entering employment rehabilitation.
(3) Figures for October 1984 relate to numbers attending employment rehabilitation centres at that date.
(4) Figures in each column have been rounded to the nearest one hundred.

Programme: Community Industry (CI)

	Financial Year													
	1971-72	1972-73	1973-74	1974-75	1975-76	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	September 1984	1984-85
Scotland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,725	1,698	1,722	1,635	1,654
Northern	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,159	1,135	1,133	1,086	1,117
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,230	1,249	1,254	1,202	1,222
North West	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,306	1,305	1,320	1,296	1,313
Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	784	777	769	733	748
Wales	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	956	949	960	962	964
South West	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	223	232	221	228	233
South East	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	117	114	112	118	115
London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	680	657	646	593	598
Great Britain	550	2,300	2,300	2,300	4,600	6,300	6,300	8,000	6,900	8,000	8,180	8,116	8,137	7,853	7,964

Notes:
1. Figures shown for financial years are average annual occupancy, previous numbers of actual participants are not available.
2. Figures shown for September 1984 are current numbers participating.
3. A regional breakdown is not available prior to 1981-82.

Programme: Agency Rehabilitation

	*Great Britain
1974-75	†
1975-76	†
1976-77	640
1977-78	620
1978-79	545
1979-80	560
1980-81	520
1981-82	540
1982-83	500
1983-84	515
September 1984	149
1984-85	554

* Regions: Scotland; Northern; Yorkshire and Humberside; North West; Midlands; Wales; South West; South East; London.
† Not available.
Note: Regional figures not available.

Programme: Voluntary Projects Programme (VPP)

	Financial Year June 1984
Scotland	766
Northern	783
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,960
North West	1,828
Midlands	1,670
Wales	905
South West	998
South East	1,731
London	1,473
GREAT BRITAIN	12,114

Notes:
(1) Figures shown were derived from a census held in June 1984.
(2) Due to the voluntary nature of the programme, forecast figures not available.
(3) Figures have been rounded to the nearest one hundred.
(4) VPP was launched in August 1982 as an experimental programme. Statistics were only brought onto a financial year basis from April 1984. Earlier figures are therefore not available.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Barron asked the Secretary of State for Employment if he is satisfied that all normal and statutory checks and examinations have been carried out in the last 12 months at all nuclear power stations.

Mr. Goodlad: I have been asked to reply.

Yes, under the licensing arrangements all normal and statutory checks and examinations have been carried out.

ENERGY

Coal and Oil Prices

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what is the average price paid by the Central Electricity Generating Board for *(a)* coal and *(b)* oil over the last three months for which figures are available; and how these figures compare with those for the same periods in 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983;

(2) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for coal and oil delivered to power stations under the control of the Central Electricity Generating Board, in the most recent month or week for which figures are available, the average or a representative price per tonne.

Mr. Goodlad: The latest available information, published in the "Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1984", shows that the average price of coal and

oil burnt at power stations in Great Britain in 1983 was £42·29 and £120·71 per tonne, respectively. The corresponding figures for the earlier years are as follows:

	Coal £	*Oil* £
1980	31·84	85·73
1981	37·43	107·87
1982	40·21	109·41

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to the landed price of *(a)* imported coal other than anthracite and *(b)* imported heavy fuel oil in the latest month for which figures are available for the corresponding month in 1983.

Mr. David Hunt: Information about the price of imported coal and fuel oil can be derived from *Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom*, which is available in the Library of the House.

Oil Imports (Libya)

Mr. Welsh asked the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the amount of oil imported into the United Kingdom from Libya since March 1984; and at what cost.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Information about the amounts of oil which have been imported into the United Kingdom is provided in *Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom*, which is available in the Library of the House.

TRANSPORT

Rural Areas (Signposting)

Mr. Spence asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether the priorities of his recent circular 11/84 dealing with signposting of local tourist facilities in rural areas represents a change of his policy with regard to the introduction of such signs.

Mrs. Chalker: No. Department of the Environment circular 11/84 gives advice on the planning considerations governing the erection off highway land of signs advertising nearby tourist attractions. On grounds of safety, highway authorities do not normally allow such commercial advertisements within the highway boundary. Directional signs to tourist attractions must either be prescribed in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1981 or specially authorised by the Secretary of State for Transport. We have already prescribed some signs for tourist attractions and are experimenting with different designs in Kent and Nottinghamshire.

A11 (Norfolk)

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now give a higher priority to the conversion to dual carriageway of the A11 road in Norfolk.

Mrs. Chalker: There are a number of schemes in the trunk road programme for improving the A11 between Newmarket and Norwich. Where they can be economically justified, dual carriageways will be provided. Also, as I undertook in replying to the Adjournment debate on 6 November, at columns 97-104, initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder), those stretches for which there are no schemes in the road programme will be examined to see whether there is a case for a limited length of dualling which can prevent a build-up of long platoons of slow-moving traffic.

Passenger Transport

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of stage journeys on public passenger road transport in 1983.

Mr. David Mitchell: The number of stage journeys on public road passenger transport in 1983 was 5,550 million.

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the level of stage service fares for all bus operators in each of the years 1964 to 1984 expressed in constant prices.

Mr. David Mitchell: My Department does not collect national data on the level of stage service fares; instead, it collects information on changes in stage service fares from which it calculates a fares index. The index for all bus operators in Great Britain in each of the years 1964 to 1984 relative to 31 December 1973 = 100 and deflated by the retail prices index was as follows:

Year	
1964	86·3
1965	87·5
1966	91·0
1967	91·5
1968	92·8
1969	93·2
1970	99·7
1971	107·2
1972	106·8
1973	102·0
1974	98·5
1975	107·6
1976	117·6
1977	116·4
1978	122·6
1979	121·6
1980	131·2
1981	132·2
1982	139·4
1983	138·6
1984	*138

* Estimated.

Schoolchildren (Accident Statistics)

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is able to estimate the number of schoolchildren involved in fatal or serious road accidents on their way to and from school; what measures are currently in force to restrict the speed of, and warn, motorists in the vicinity of school gates; and how these measures compare with the practice in other countries of the European Economic Community, the United States of America and Australia.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1983, 11,180 children, age 16 and under, were casualties while travelling to or from school, of which 96 and 2,636 were involved in fatal accidents and serious accidents respectively. The 73 children killed included 58 pedestrians and 12 cyclists; the 2,409 children seriously injured included 1,814 pedestrians and 409 cyclists.

School-related speed limits have been suggested before, but examination of the idea leaves me very

doubtful that they would have any safety benefit. Such periodic, low speed limits would be confusing to drivers; permanent low speed limits would tend to be ignored because they would be seen to be irrelevant much of the time. The use of "School Ahead" warning signs and yellow zig-zag markings are a better approach to securing greater awareness on the part of motorists of the need for extra care and attention.

Measures adopted in other countries reflect particular national conditions and requirements and would not necessarily be suited for implementation here.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to ensure that changes in transport supplementary grant do not lead to a lower standard of road maintenance.

Mrs. Chalker: There is no reason why the changes in the transport supplementary grant system should affect the standard of local authority road maintenance. Local authorities' current expenditure will continue to be supported through block grant and individual authorities are free to decide their own priorities.

Pilotage

Mr. Thornton asked the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions in the last 25 years he has used his powers under section 78 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1906 to grant a dispensation from compulsory pilotage; and what were the circumstances on each occasion.

Mr. David Mitchell: I shall answer this question shortly.

SCOTLAND

Education Expenditure

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information his Department has on the expenditure on education per pupil in the grant-aided and independent sector in the latest year; and if he will disaggregate the figures for primary and secondary sectors.

Mr. Allan Stewart: This information is not held centrally.

Departmental Computers

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the type and country of origin of manufacture of the computers in use at the Scottish Office; and what was their purchase cost.

Mr. Younger: The Scottish Office has two model 3032 mainframe computers manufactured in France by International Business Machines Ltd. They were purchased separately in 1979 and 1980 and cost £1,633,101 and £1,054,303, respectively.

Equipment peripheral to the mainframe computers and purchased over a period of years was also manufactured by IBM and cost £2,147,726. It had a number of countries of origin including the United Kingdom, United States of America, West Germany and Sweden.

The Scottish Office also uses 145 micro and minicomputers purchased over a period of some years from a variety of manufacturers including Apple Computer (UK) Ltd., Commodore Business Machines (UK) Ltd., Comart Ltd., Cromenco Ltd., Digital Equipment Co. Ltd., Hewlett Packard Ltd., International Business Machines (UK) Ltd., International Computers Ltd. and Lucas Industries Ltd. No central record is held of purchase costs or country of origin of manufacture.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the parliamentary constituencies in Scotland by *(a)* total percentage unemployment rate and *(b)* male percentage unemployment rate from the 1981 census.

Mr. John MacKay: The percentages of men aged 16 to 64 and women aged 16 to 59 in each parliamentary constituency who were classified in the 1981 census as "out of employment" are given in tables E and F respectively of the "Paliamentary Constituency Monitor, 1983 Boundaries, Scotland", a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Unemployment (Dundee)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the figures showing the number and percentage unemployed in the Dundee travel-to-work area; and if he will publish similar figures for the district wards within the travel-to-work area.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's letter to him of 22 October. Unemployment data by travel-to-work area are now available in the House of Commons Library; totals for individual wards will be made available from mid 1985.

Private Nursing Homes

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the public or professional bodies which regulate the establishment of private nursing homes in Scotland; and if he will make a statement on the safeguards to ensure that an adequate standard of service is provided by these homes.

Mr. John MacKay: In addition to applying to the local planning authority concerned for any planning permission which may be necessary, persons seeking to establish a private nursing home or hospital are required to apply for registration to the health board for the area in which it is to be located. Private hospital developments of 120 beds or more require the specific authorisation of the Secretary of State. As registering authorities, health boards are empowered by the Nursing Home Registration (Scotland) Act 1938, as amended, and associated regulations, to inspect the registered establishments in their area at regular intervals to ensure that adequate standards of care and accommodation are provided and maintained.

Schaw Hospital, Bearsden

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to make an announcement on the future of Schaw hospital, Bearsden.

Mr. John MacKay: I hope to be able to reply very shortly to Greater Glasgow health board's application to close and dispose of this hospital.

Teachers

Mrs. McCurley asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about proposed changes in the scope of grant aid towards the in-service training of teachers.

Mr. Younger: I have today laid before Parliament the Education (Grants for In-Service Training of Teachers) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1984, which add to the list of subject areas in which attendance by teachers at in-service courses may attract grant aid in the current financial year. The added courses, all of which are among the national courses sponsored for 1985 by the National Committee for In-Service Training of Teachers, are related to management of staff development, writing of course modules in physical education, and the curriculum for young people with severe mental handicap.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Tristan da Cunha (Electricity Generation)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to how electricity is generated on Tristan da Cunha.

Mr. Renton: Tristan da Cunha's electricity supply is provided by diesel generators owned by a private firm Tristan Investments Ltd. About 500 MWH/year are produced. In addition, there is a small emergency generator.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much bilateral aid, in monetary terms, Great Britain has given to Ethiopia in every year since 1974.

Mr. Raison: The details are as follows:

Figures of aid to the Ethiopian Government and through voluntary relief agencies working throughout Ethiopia

	£'000
1974	2,058
1975	2,909
1976	2,332
1977	1,726
1978	2,766
1979	2,763
1980	1,969
1981	166
1982	5,300
1983	3,037

Note:
This includes development loans and grants, disaster relief and technical co-operation, but excludes aid channelled through the European Community, the World Food Programme and other multilateral agencies.

Turkey

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all aid given to Turkey since 1979.

Mr. Raison: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) on 20 February, at column *392*, in which I said that disbursements on British bilateral aid to Turkey since 1979 were as follows:

£'000

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*
Project Aid	114	—	295	446	—
Programme aid	—	7,585	21,185	12,533	3,309
Debt Refinancing	3,723	—	10,158	3,327	1,634
Disaster Relief	10	13	—	—	89
Technical Co-operation	406	437	470	576	365
Total	4,253	8,035	32,108	16,882	5,397

In addition, Turkey benefits from aid from the European Community. Expenditure is now taking place from the third financial protocol and from a special aid package. The third financial protocol provides 220 million ecu for loans on special terms from the Community budget and 90 million ecu of loans from the European Investment Bank's own resources. The United Kingdom share of the aid financed from the budget is about £28 million. At the end of 1983 expenditure on special loans from the budget amounted to 108 million ecu (of which the United Kingdom share was about £14 million). The special aid package for 50 million ecu, of which the United Kingdom share is about £6 million.

Heroin

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in co-operation with the Government of Pakistan in preventing the export of heroin from that country; and what further assistance Her Majesty's Government will give for the replacing of poppy cultivation by other crops.

Mr. Raison: We co-operate closely with the Government of Pakistan and other Governments in an international programme aimed at reducing the export of heroin from Pakistan. The amount of opium grown in Pakistan has reduced from 800 tons in 1979 to an estimated 40 to 45 tons this year. Our customs liaison officer in Pakistan has provided information which has led to a number of arrests.

I shall consider the possibility of giving further assistance in the light of the progress of our current programme of assistance for crop substitution.

Aid Statistics

Mr. Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total of aid given by means of non-returnable grant, whether in cash or kind, for the year 1983-84; and what proportion this was of the United Kingdom's total aid budget.

Mr. Raison: Total aid in the form of grants in 1983-84 was £1,028 million, amounting to 93 per cent. of the gross aid programme.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what estimates the Overseas Development Agency drought unit has made of the shortfall of basic grain feedstuffs in each region in Ethiopia; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what estimates have been made by the Overseas Development Agency drought unit of the number of persons affected by the lack of rainfall in Ethiopia over the past four years.

Mr. Raison: The task of making such assessments lies primarily with the Ethiopian authorities and relevant international agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Food Programme.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what long-term initiatives the Overseas Development Agency drought unit has formulated to combat drought in Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: Any long-term policy will have to be examined on a co-ordinated basis between potential donors and the Ethiopian Government. My administration is concentrating on the immediate delivery of relief supplies of all kinds.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received or expects to be proposed by the Overseas Development Agency drought unit on the results of the 1984 harvest and the prospects for the 1985 harvest in Ethiopia.

Mr. Raison: A crop assessment mission from the Food and Agricultural Organisation is now in Ethiopia, and we expect to receive an account of its findings.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the European Economic Community to establish when European Economic Community grain committed to Ethiopia will arrive at Assab, Massawa or Djibouti; when it is likely to be in famine areas in Ethiopia; and what is the timetable being proposed.

Mr. Raison: My officials keep in close touch with those of the European Commission. 10,000 tonnes of grain agreed by the European Community last month as emergency aid will arrive in Ethiopia in mid-December. A further 25,000 tonnes emergency aid announced on 13 November will arrive by the end of December. 25,000 tonnes for a food for work project will arrive in two shipments in February and April next year. The European Commission's intention is to ship in addition 10,000 tonnes a month to Ethiopia throughout 1985, but this depends on agreement by the member states on the 1985 food aid programme. We are continuing to press urgently for a decision. I have no doubt that the voluntary organisations and Ethiopian Government agencies who will handle the grain on its arrival will make every effort to ensure it gets to the affected areas quickly.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with the World Food Programme in Rome about likely arrivals of grain at Assab, Massawa or Djibouti for Ethiopia in November, December and January; and what is his estimate of the level of grain stocks at each of these ports to be moved by road and by air lift;

(2) how much grain the Royal Air Force has so far airlifted in Ethiopia; how much he now expects it to be able to move per day; and whether he is satisfied sufficient grain will arrive at ports in Ethiopia or Djibouti in the rest of November, December and January to keep the United Kingdom and other airlifts working to full capacity.

Mr. Raison: The most reliable estimates available to me based on discussions with the World Food Programme indicate that grain arrivals at Assab will 26,300 tonnes in November, 86,000 tonnes in December and 52,700 tonnes in January. In addition, approximately 40,000 tonnes of grain are currently in stock at Assab, which is being removed from the port at the rate of about 3,000 tonnes a day. There is no clear information available on future arrivals at Massawa or Djibouti, but I understand there are no significant stocks of grain for Ethiopia at either port.

By 12 November the Royal Air Force had airlifted about 450 tonnes of grain in Ethiopia. On average each of the two Hercules expect to move about 40 tonnes a day.

St. Helena

Mr. Stuart Holland asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the value per head of the Government's aid programme to St. Helena.

Mr. Raison: The 1983 figure was approximately £1,300 per head.

Aid Level

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding the future level of overseas aid in the light of increased famine conditions in the Third world; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: The Government have received represenations from the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development, Christian Aid, Euro-Action-Accord, Oxfam, Save the Children Fund, War on Want, World Development Movement, Members of Parliament and individuals. It is the Government's intention to maintain a substantial aid programme. An announcement will shortly be made about its level for 1985-86.

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of the budget for overseas aid following the Chancellor's autumn statement.

Mr. Raison: The Government intend to maintain a substantial aid programme. An announcement will shortly be made about its level for 1985-86.

Aid (Allocation Criteria)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the

developmental criteria and relevant commercial and political factors which he takes into account in deciding on the allocation of aid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: The fundamental objective of the aid programme is to promote sustainable economic and social progress and to alleviate poverty in developing countries particularly the poorest ones. While pursuing this aim we endeavour to assist the export of British goods and services primarily through tying much of our aid to their procurement. We believe that a substantial bilateral aid programme is an important aspect of our wider political relationship with developing countries.

DEFENCE

Cruise Missile

69. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is satisfied with the progress of the cruise missile programme.

Mr. Stanley: The deployment programme for ground-launched cruise missiles in the United Kingdom is proceeding satisfactorily.

Red Sea (Mines)

70. **Mr. Mikardo** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will report to the House the conclusions of the investigations into the incidents whereby mines were laid in international waterways in the Red sea; whether the retrieval of one mine by British minesweepers has revealed its origin and those responsible for its laying; and what protests he has made.

71. **Mr. Robert C. Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what has been revealed from the mine retrieved from the Red sea by a British minesweeper; and what protest has been made to those responsible.

Mr. Stanley: The mine recovered by the Royal Navy from Egyptian territorial waters in the Gulf of Suez was of Soviet manufacture, but we do not know who was responsible for laying it. It has therefore not been possible for any protests to be made.

Anglo-Italian Collaborative Projects

Mr. George asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those Anglo-Italian collaborative defence projects *(a)* completed, *(b)* currently being undertaken and *(c)* publicly committed to; and if he will express each in terms of total cost and numbers involved.

Mr. Butler: The EH101 helicopter project, development of which was launched earlier this year, is the first major programme to be undertaken bilaterally by the United Kingdom and Italy.

Our two countries have, however, collaborated jointly with Germany on Tornado and on the FH70 and SP70 gun projects. The first two of these equipments are now in service with the armed forces of the three nations, while the third is still in development. The United Kingdom and Italy are also working, together with other NATO countries, on a number of multilateral collaborative projects, including:

Sidewinder Aim 9L	*Co-production projects*
MLRS Phase 1	
European Fighter Aircraft	*Early Feasibility Studies in progress*
NATO Frigate NFR 90	

It is not the practice to provide information on costs and estimated production numbers for projects of this nature.

Shoeburyness Establishment

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in the preparations for contracting out certain services at the defence establishment in Shoeburyness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Invitations to tender are being prepared for contractor operation of stores and transport, range services and some administrative functions at the proof and experimental establishment, Shoeburyness. It is intended to invite tenders early in the new year, with a view to implementation on 1 April 1986.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Young asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the extra cost of the air transport communications with the Falklands per return flight *(a)* from the United Kingdom to Ascension Island and *(b)* from Ascension Island to the Falklands; and how these costs are compared.

Mr. Stanley: The estimated extra cost of a return aircraft flight from the United Kingdom to Ascension Island by VC10 is £60,000 and from Ascension Island to the Falkland Islands by Hercules, including tanker support, £80,000.

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Defence what requests have been made to individual owner-occupied farms in the Falkland Islands for leases of land for military training purposes; what is the basis of rent or compensation offered; and what similar requests or arrangements have been entered into with the Falkland Islands Company.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Procurement Expenditure (Scotland)

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the share of procurement expenditure on equipment purchased in Scotland in *(a)* 1981-82, *(b)* 1982-83 and *(c)* 1983-84.

Mr. Butler: We estimate that the proportion of defence equipment procurement expenditure spent in Scotland is as follows:

	per cent.
1981-82	7
1982-83	7
1983-84	6

These figures are for direct payments to main contractors and do not take account of payments made to subcontractors in Scotland. Expenditure on international collaborative projects is also excluded from these figures.

Tornado

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tornado aircraft have been destroyed or

seriously damaged in accidents since its introduction into operational service; and how that figure compares with the expected attrition rate at this stage.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

General Belgrano and HMS Conqueror

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether questions from hon. Members on the sinking of the General Belgrano and the whereabouts of HMS Conqueror were answered without reference to the navigator's log book of HMS Conqueror.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 13 November.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the missing log of HMS Conqueror contains *(a)* the time at which the General Belgrano was first sighted, *(b)* any information relating to the course of the General Belgrano after it was sighted, *(c)* the time at which the General Belgrano was attacked by HMS Conqueror, *(d)* information relating to the damage sustained to the General Belgrano from the attack, *(e)* the times of signals to and from Northwood and *(f)* information relating to the contents of signals to and from Northwood.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to the specimen copy of a control room log which I have placed in the Library. He will see from that that it is unlikely that the missing control room log from HMS Conqueror contains any of the information listed. This is recorded in other documents; primarily the captain's account.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any information contained in the missing log of HMS Conqueror is not contained in the captain's log.

Mr. Heseltine: Yes. As can be seen from the uncompleted log in the Library, the control room log contains routine information and instrument readings at hourly intervals which would not be recorded in the captain's account.

Nuclear Submarines (Logs)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence at what intervals *(a)* captain's, *(b)* navigational and *(c)* signals logs are removed from nuclear submarines; and what is the procedure for dealing with each of them after they are removed.

Mr. Heseltine: Submarine commanding officers submit a report to their operational commanders at the end of each patrol. These reports are supported by detailed records including narrative accounts of operations and exercises. Instructions for handling completed submarine control room logs are in Queen's Regulations for the Royal Navy which are available in the Library. Signal logs are not retained permanently.

Greenham Common

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence why armed United States soldiers were allowed directly to confront Greenham common women cutting their way through the inner security fence at the cruise missile base on Sunday 5 November.

Mr. Stanley: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the incident on 4 November which was described in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. McNair-Wilson) on 9 November, at column *41*. United States personnel were on duty inside the cruise missile facility within the base but all the women concerned were apprehended outside the facility by British personnel.

Nimrod Early Warning

Mr. George asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Nimrod airborne early warning to be fully operational; what will be the total cost per plane; and how the figure differs from the original estimate upon signing of contracts.

Mr. Butler: It is neither our policy to reveal the dates on which defence systems become fully operational nor to divulge information which is commercially confidential.

Low-flying Aircraft (Welsh National Parks)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any A-10, F1-11, Tornado or Jaguar aircraft have taken part in low-flying exercises over Welsh national parks in accordance with the "follow-on force attack" concept under development by the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe.

Mr. Stanley: As I explained to the House in the debate on Adjournment on 31 October, the follow-on force attack concept is a guide to long term planning and not to the detailed conduct of exercises.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether United States air force aircraft carry out low-flying exercises over Welsh national parks according to either the inter-service agreement on joint attack of the second echelon or the memorandum of understanding on joint US Army/US air force efforts for enhancement of joint employment of the airland battle doctrine.

Mr. Stanley: These documents relate to the development of US national doctrine for joint employment of land and air forces, which has not been exercised in this country.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether any aircraft of the United States air force in Europe have taken part in low-flying exercises over Welsh national parks; and whether all such exercises have been NATO exercises.

Mr. Stanley: There have been no major low-flying exercises involving aircraft of the United States air force in Europe flying over Welsh national parks this year. However, day-to-day routine training of USAF aircraft based in the United Kingdom includes low-level overflights of most parts of the country, including Welsh national parks.

Cyprus

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many residents from each of *(a)* the southern part of Cyprus and *(b)* the northern part of Cyprus now work at the United Kingdom sovereign base of Dekhelia in Cyprus;

(2) how many Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots are now employed at the United Kingdom sovereign base in Dekhelia, Cyprus.

Mr. Butler: There are 880 Greek Cypriots and 337 Turkish Cypriots currently employed at the eastern sovereign base area, Dekhelia. Apart from a small number who live in the United Nations buffer zone, all the Turkish Cypriots reside in the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus—with the exception of three who are resident in the base itself—and all the Greek Cypriots reside either in the Republic of Cyprus south of the buffer zone or in the base.

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots are employed at the United Kingdom sovereign base in Akrotiri, Cyprus.

Mr. Butler: There are currently 1,980 Greek Cypriots and no Turkish Cypriots at the western sovereign base area, Akrotiri.

Army Cataloguing Authority

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many professional and technical staff of the Army cataloguing authority have so far volunteered to move to Glasgow; and how many qualified staff have so far been recruited in the Glasgow area.

Mr. Butler: Eleven professional and technical staff have so far opted to go to Glasgow, together with a further 23 recruited internally in the MOD. A total of 15 qualified applicants for posts with the ACA have so far been successful at external recruitment boards held in Glasgow.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to be able to announce the results of his review of the proposed dispersal of the Army cataloguing authority to Glasgow.

Mr. Butler: I expect to make a statement on the outcome of this review of dispersal policy shortly.

Military Installations (Deaths and Injuries)

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many non-military people have been injured or killed whilst visiting military installations, in the past five years.

Mr. Stanley: The information requested will take some time to assemble. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to my hon. Friend.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received the report of the board of inquiry investigating the missing log of HMS Conqueror; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: No. On the question of a statement, I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer to him of 13 November.

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will institute court martial proceedings against the captain or any other crew member of HMS Conqueror, following the loss of the navigator's log book; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I cannot prejudge the outcome of the board of inquiry. On the question of a statement, I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer of 13 November, at column *228*, to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes).

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Defence from what date the new navigator's log book of HMS Conqueror has been kept.

Mr. Heseltine: The control room log of a submarine is kept continuously. As my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces said in another place on 7 November, the period covered by the missing sections of the log is April to September 1982.

NATO (Conventional Defence Doctrine)

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he expects the next meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Defence Ministers to discuss changes in conventional defence doctrine.

Mr. Stanley: NATO's strategy of flexible response and forward defence remains valid and no change to it, is in prospect. We would expect Ministers at their December meeting to take stock on a range of defence planning business concerned with the effective implementation of that strategy in the light of the developing Warsaw pact threat.

NATO Exercises

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation exercises which have been carried out in Europe to date in 1984; and whether any of them involved Pershing II missiles.

Mr. Stanley: Security considerations prevent me from publishing a comphrehensive list of NATO exercises and detailing the involvement of particular nuclear systems.

501st Tactical Missile Wing

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that deployment exercises carried out by the 501st Tactical Missile Wing outside the perimeter of Greenham common, take place with unarmed cruise missiles.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1983", paragraph 209.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is satisfied with the participation of British service men in the field exercises of the 501st Tactical Missile Wing at Greenham common.

Mr. Stanley: Yes.

United States Forces (Exercises)

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether United States forces in the United Kingdom have taken part in exercises in accordance with the joint United States army—United States air force memorandum of understanding entitled, "Efforts for Enhancement of Joint Employment of the Airland Battle Doctrine", agreed on 21 April 1983.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *152*]: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to a question from the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas).

Airland Battle Doctrine

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence in what way the United States airland battle doctrine is incompatible with NATO doctrine.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *155*]: Airland battle, which is spelt out in United States field manual 100-5, is the US army's tactical doctrine for dealing with the contingencies it might face around the world, not just in Europe. There are, therefore, aspects, such as jungle warfare, which do not apply to NATO. Airland battle is not agreed NATO doctrine and the manual makes clear that US army forces will operate in Europe under NATO procedures and principles. The question of incompatibility within NATO does not, therefore, arise.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the airland battle doctrine has been discussed by NATO ambassadors in the defence planning committee.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *155*]: Airland battle, as the doctrine set out in the US army's field manual 100-5 is known, is official US army, and not NATO, doctrine. It has not been introduced for formal consideration by NATO authorities, though the allies have naturally been made aware of it.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Deakins asked the Lord Privy Seal what has been the average number of written questions answered on each sitting day in the 1983-84 Session; and what has been the trend in this figure in recent years.

Mr. Biffen: The number of sitting days in each Session and the total number of notices of questions for written answer which appeared on the Order Paper during each Session since 1977-78 is given, together with the average per sitting day, in the following table:

	Sitting Days	*Notices of Questions*	*Average per Sitting Day*
1977-78	169	28,630	169
1978-79	86	12,952	151
1979-80	244	39,912	164
1980-81	163	22,688	139
1981-82	174	23,439	135
1982-83	115	17,095	149
1983-84	213	40,119	188

Harcourt Room

Mr. Dubs asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will list the occasions during the last 12 months when the Harcourt Room was not available at meal times for hon. Members; and what was the nature of the functions which were held instead.

Mr. Biffen: Under the general regulations regarding the booking of dining rooms, the Harcourt Room may be reserved by Members for private entertaining on Mondays and Fridays at lunchtime, provided alternative accommodation is available for Members. During the last 12 months, the Harcourt Room has been reserved in this way on 30 occasions. It is not the Refreshment Department's practice to make public information which may be available to it on the nature of functions sponsored by hon. Members.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Council of Finance Ministers

Mr. Maples asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the 12 November meeting of the European Council of Finance Ministers.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers in Brussels on 12 November.

The Council reached agreement on a common position on measures to guarantee the effective application of the guidelines on budgetary discipline adopted by the Brussels and Fontainebleau European Councils. The intention is that a final text will be formally adopted as conclusions of the Council of Ministers after a meeting with a delegation from the European Parliament to be held on 21 November.

The text agreed by the ECOFIN Council incorporates the European Council guidelines into the Community's budgetary procedures and contains provisions to ensure that in future the rate of growth of net expenditure relating to agricultural markets will be less than the rate of growth of the own resources base. The agreement thus achieves the Government's objectives on budgetary discipline. The text of the Council's common position will be made available to Parliament as soon as possible.

The Council also discussed the position to be adopted by the Community in discussion in the OECD on export credits for aircraft and mixed credits. These issues were referred to COREPER for futher consideration.

The Council had a preliminary discussion of the setting of a new multiannual ceiling for FEOGA Guidance expenditure.

The Council invited COREPER to prepare a report on a Commission proposal to harmonise the income tax regime applicable to Community residents living in one member state and working in another.

Civil Servants (Customs and Excise Grades)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many civil servants are employed in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise grades; what is the total inclusive cost of their employment; and if he will provide similar information for each of the previous five years.

Mr. Hayhoe: At 1 October 1984 Her Majesty's Customs and Excise employed a total of 25,570 staff. I am not sure what my hon. Friend has in mind in his request for the total inclusive cost of their employment, but the following table provides information for each of the last five years with costs based on (1) total staff remuneration and employers' national insurance contributions and superannuation costs and (2) the total cost of Customs and Excise administration including accommodation and other services:

	Total staff (31 March)	Costs (1) £ million	(2) £ million
1979-80	27,273	194·3	245·7
1980-81	26,861	238·1	299·7
1981-82	26,256	259·7	334·8
1982-83	25,702	272·8	353·3
1983-84	25,309	283·3	365·8

Interest Rates

Mr. Latham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement on the current level of interest rates.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Hirst).

Charities (VAT)

Mr. Maclean asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the number of charities which are currently liable to pay value added tax;

(2) if he will estimate the amount of revenue which would be lost by exempting charities from value added tax.

Mr. Hayhoe: I refer my hon. Friend to my replies of 2 March, at column *365*, to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence).

Cannabis

Mr. Terlezki asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what instructions have been given by his Department to customs officers concerning the prosecution of people coming into the country with small amounts of cannabis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise has given instructions to its officers at certain ports and airports that, for illegal importations of not more than 10 grams of cannabis, the importer may be offered the option of compounding proceedings under section 152 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979.

European Currency Unit

Mr. Jackson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress was noted, and what discussions took place, at the meeting on 12 November of the European Community Council of Economic and Finance Ministers with regard to the development of the public and private ecu.

Mr. Ian Stewart: This was not discussed at the meeting of Economic and Finance Ministers on 12 November.

Hotels

Mr. Freeson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what activities of hotels are categorised as non-trading for tax purposes;

(2) what activities of guest houses are categorised as non-trading for tax purposes;

(3) what activities of boarding houses are categorised as non-trading for tax purposes.

Mr. Lawson: I shall let the right hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Money Transfer

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all measures taken by him since March 1981, including provisions in Finance Acts, which *(a)* affect the incomes of individuals or companies in the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man and *(b)* affect the transfer and subsequent taxation of money from the United Kingdom to the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man.

Mr. Moore: Like other taxpayers, individuals and companies resident in the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man who have United Kingdom income are affected by a very wide range of provisions in Finance Acts. The following tax measures enacted since March 1981 may be particularly relevant to the transfer, and subsequent taxation, of money from the United Kingdom to the Channel Islands and Isle of Man:

Sections 45 and 46, Finance Act 1981 (transfer of assets abroad);
Sections 80 to 84, Finance Act 1981 (capital gains of non-resident settlements);
Section 12, Finance (No. 2) Act 1983 (domicile);
Section 76, Finance Act 1984 (insurance policies issued outside the United Kingdom);
Sections 82 to 91, Finance Act 1984 (controlled foreign companies); and
Sections 92 to 100, Finance Act 1984 (offshore funds).

Low-tax Areas

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effect on the economy of low-tax areas and, in particular, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

Mr. Moore: We are concerned about all tax-induced distortions of the economy, including those arising from the existence of low tax areas.

Channel Islands and the Isle of Man (Taxation)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on revenue to the Exchequer for each year since 1979 of the tax laws in operation in the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

Mr. Moore: I regret that this information is not available.

"Official Report"

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the missing sections of the *Official Report* prior to volume No. 52 will be issued in bound form.

Mr. Hayhoe: The only two such volumes not yet published are Nos. 30 and 43, Sessional Indexes for 1981-82 and 1982-83 respectively. It is expected that volume 30 will be published at the end of November 1984 and volume 43 in February 1985.

Starter Batteries

Mr. Gould asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish correct figures for imports of starter batteries from Japan and Taiwan for 1984; if he will explain how the errors arose; and if he is satisfied that these imports are now being properly recorded.

Mr. Hayhoe: Yes, the necessary corrections will be incorporated in the cumulative figures published in subsequent issues of the *United Kingdom Overseas Trade Statistics* and in the more detailed statistics obtainable from the Customs and Excise statistical office. The errors arose from a number of incorrect declarations by importers or their agents in which imported starter batteries were wrongly classified. After discussion with the trade association concerned, Customs and Excise statistical office is making arrangements which should help to ensure the future accuracy of the figures.

Exchange Controls

Mr. Canavan asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated amount of outflow of investment from Britain as a result of the lifting of exchange controls in 1979.

Mr. Ian Stewart: It is not possible to estimate how much of the increase in overseas investment is due to the lifting of exchange controls.

Industrial Output

Mr. Nellist asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the movement of industrial output *(a)* per insured worker and *(b)* per head of the population for each year since May 1979.

Mr. Peter Rees: Information, in index form, on output per person employed in production industries can be found on page 34 of the CSO's monthly publication *Economic Trends*. Similar figures of output of production industries per head of population can be derived from information on page 26 of *Economic Trends* and table 1.17 of the "UK National Accounts" 1984 edition. Copies of these publications are available in the Library of the House.

Scottish Bank Notes

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce legislation to make notes issued by Scottish banks legal tender; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart: No. We have no plans to alter the arrangements relating to Scottish bank notes.

Dual Resident Companies

Mr. Howarth asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to review the taxation of dual resident companies.

Mr. Moore: I have authorised the Inland Revenue to publish today a consultative document regarding the tax treatment of dual resident companies. Representations should be sent to the Board of Inland Revenue to arrive, if possible, by 15 January 1985.

This is part of our continuing review of the taxation of international business. Statements on other aspects will be made in due course.

VAT (Take-away Food and Drink)

Mr. Parry asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the recent representations made to him by small businesses in respect of the effect of imposing value added tax on hot take-away food.

Mr. Moore: Some 20 letters have been received by Treasury Ministers during the last month or so.

Unemployment (Cost)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out in tabular form his best estimate of the average monthly cost to the Exchequer when an adult male worker on average weekly earnings, on the basis of all industries and services covered by the "New Earnings Survey", updated by the average earnings index and assuming pay was not affected by absence, becomes unemployed, showing separately *(a)* for single men and *(b)* for a married man with two children, one aged under five and the other aged between five and 10, the following disbursements (i) unemployment benefit, (ii) supplementary benefit, (iii) income tax rebate, (iv) housing benefit and the following losses of revenue, (v) from income tax, (vi) from taxes on consumption of goods and services (vii) from employer's national insurance contributions and from employee's national insurance contributions.

Mr. Peter Rees [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 November 1984, c. *265*]: Further assumptions are required in order to calculate the benefit entitlements of the individuals described. For the table it has been assumed that the men are entitled to full unemployment benefit, that the married man's wife does not work, that the man is a householder, that he is a council tenant in a property appropriate to his family size and that his housing benefit is calculated on the basis of estimated average rent and rates in the 1984-85 financial year. The figures assume equal length months of one twelfth of a year and are based on benefit rates applicable from 26 November 1984.

	Unemployment Benefit £	*Supplementary Allowance* £	*Housing Benefits* £
Single man	123·28	13·65	70·20
Married man with 2 children, one under 5 and one between 5 and 10	199·33	30·98	92·95

Changes in taxation for an individual depend further upon assumptions about when he becomes unemployed, the duration of his unemployment and his spending and saving behaviour when employed and unemployed. Any figures calculated in this way do not represent a net loss of revenue for the Exchequer as revenue flows may also change elsewhere in the economy, depending on assumptions about conditions elsewhere in the economy, were the level of unemployment different.

SOCIAL SERVICES

National Insurance Contributions

41. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the expected yield from national insurance contributions in the current year.

Mr. Newton: The income to the national insurance fund for the year 1984-85 from contributions is estimated by the Government Actuary in his report on the Social Security (Contributions) Re-Rating Order 1984 (Cmnd. 9386) as £19,021 million, after recovery by employers of statutory sick pay.

Computer Services (West Midlands)

Mr. Heddle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money has been spent by the West Midlands regional health authority for each year since 1979 to the latest available date on research and development of computer services; and how much money has been specifically offered by the Department to the West Midlands regional health authority to carry out a pilot study on the computerisation of hospital waiting lists.

Mr. John Patten: Information on expenditure on research and development of computer services by the West Midlands regional health authority is not collected centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to write to the regional health authority chairman, who may be able to let him have the required information.

The total cost of the pilot study on the computerisation of hospital waiting lists is estimated to be £10,000 capital and £85,000 revenue over three years. For 1984-85, £10,000 capital and £25,000 revenue funding has been approved by the Department to the West Midlands regional health authority. Subject to satisfactory progress, further payments will be approved for subsequent financial years. I understand that the regional health authority is now advertising for the appropriately qualified staff.

Day and Night Care Allowance (Tayside)

Mr. Ernie Ross asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of people in Tayside in receipt of an allowance for day and night care.

Mr. Newton: I regret that this information is not available.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the approximate number of visits made to claimants' homes by his Department's staff in 1979 and 1983, respectively.

Mr. Whitney: The approximate number of effective visits made by the Department's staff to claimants in their homes was 3,752,000 in 1979 and 3,396,000 in 1983.

Maternity Allowance

Mr. Skinner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women received *(a)* maternity pay and *(b)* maternity allowance in 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Whitney: Maternity pay is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment who informs me that the figures for *(a)* are 118,128 and 125,239. In addition, payments were made to about 6,600 civil servants in each year. The figures for *(b)* are 333,200 and (up to 30 September 1983, the latest date to which figures are available) 243,500.

Burnley

Mr. Pike asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the current work load of contributory and non-contributory benefit claims and payments at his Department's Burnley offices; and how this compares with one year ago.

Mr. Whitney: The number of incapacity benefit, retirement pension, widow's benefit and child benefit claims handled and the total number of payments made (excluding supplementary benefit payments) by the Burnley local office in October 1983 and October 1984 were as follows:

	October 1983	*October 1984*
Claims	1,876	1,319
Payments	9,787	16,049

The basis of these counts has changed since 1983 and the figures are not, therefore, directly comparable.

Benefits (Take-up)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if it is his policy positively to encourage take-up of means-tested and other social security benefits.

Mr. Newton: The Department's objective is to ensure that all those who might be entitled to benefit know what is available and we encourage take-up in a variety of ways. Leaflets and claim forms are distributed widely and the Department has developed the Freefone benefit advice service. This is in operation in all areas except for London postal districts which we hope to bring in next year.

The Department also channels information directly to potential beneficiaries. For example, about three months before attaining pension age everyone with a national insurance contribution record is sent an invitation to claim retirement pension; a leaflet inviting a claim to supplementary benefit is issued to all retirement pensioners, widows, sickness benefit claimants and unemployed claimants; one-parent benefit and family income supplement and advertised in every child benefit order book; and those claiming maternity benefit are invited to claim child benefit in due course.

Rate Rebates

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the amount of money given in rate rebates between 1978-79 and 1983-84 for each year, the component figures for standard and certificated rate rebates and the numbers receiving them for each year from 1978-79 to 1983-84.

Mr. Whitney: The amount given in rate rebates from 1978-79 to 1983-84 was as follows:

Year	*Standard rebates** £ *million*	*Certificated rebates†* £ *million*	*Total* £ *million*	*Numbers of beneficiaries Millions*
1978-79	167	—	167	3·1
1979-80	201	—	201	3·1
1980-81	266	—	266	3·3
1981-82	374	—	374	3·7
1982-83	439	‡118	557	5·1
1983-84	540	718	1,258	6·7

Notes:

* For people not receiving supplementary benefit.

† For people not receiving supplementary benefit, from November 1982-April 1983. Prior to that, assistance with rates was included in supplementary benefit payments.

‡ For those local authority tenants who were covered by the partial start of housing benefit from November 1982. The full start was in April 1983.

Laundry Additions

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what criteria he uses in determining whether adequate facilities for the washing and drying of clothes exist in particular dwelling, when applications for laundry additions are refused.

Mr. Whitney: An addition to supplementary benefit can be awarded for laundry costs incurred where a claimant's home lacks "suitable washing or drying facilities". Decisions on claims for laundry additions are a matter for the independent adjudicating authorities who take account of the circumstances of each individual case. Guidance from the chief adjudication office on the interpretation of these provisions is contained in paragraph 4861(2) of the S manual, a copy of which is in the Library. I understand that the CAO is currently considering expanding his guidance on the interpretation of "suitable washing or drying facilities".

Severe Disablement Income

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimates he has made of the numbers of applicants in an average year who would have qualified for non-contributory invalidity pension but who will now not qualify for severe disablement allowance.

Mr. Newton: it is estimated that between 1,000 to 1,500 married women who have qualified annually for housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension will not qualify for severe disablement allowance. Overall, however, it is estimated that there will be a net increase in the number of married women newly qualifying for severe disablement allowance each year compared with the number who would have qualified for housewives' non-contributory invalidity pension.

Firm figures are not available of the number of men and single women who would have qualified annually for non-contributory invalidity pension but who will fail to qualify for severe disablement allowance but it is expected to be small.

High Rent Authorisation

Mr. Andrew Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate how many housing benefit claimants will lose *(a)* up to £1 *(b)* £1 to £2 *(c)* £2 to £3, *(d)* £3 to £4, *(e)* £4 to £5 and *(f)* over £5 a week as a result of planned changes to high rent authorisations in April 1985.

Mr. Whitney: I refer my hon. Friend to my hon. Friend's reply to him on 29 October, at columns *843-44*.

Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, with reference to table 2.18 of the Government expenditure plans, 1984-85 to 1986-87, Cmnd. 9143-II, if he will give a breakdown of the major components of the figures for social security from 1978-79 to 1984-85.

Mr. Whitney: The information is as follows:

£ million cash

	1978-79	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
Rent rebates	159	183	253	390	770	1621	1685
Rent allowances	36	37	44	58	66	463	378
Administration	23	28	34	38	56	79	73
Total	218	248	331	486	892	2,163	2,136

Note
The figures for 1982-83 reflect the partial start of the housing benefits scheme; those for 1983-84 show the first full year effect.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services for what categories of claimants entitlement to single payments for furniture is subject to the condition that there is no suitable alternative furnished accommodation; and how they differ from the categories to whom the condition was applied by the Supplementary Benefits Commission prior to November 1980

Mr. Newton: Under current legislation, as under the policy of the Supplementary Benefits Commission, different conditions apply for people in existing accommodation and for those moving into unfurnished or partly furnished accommodation. The categories of people currently eligible for help when moving home—defined precisely in regulation 10(1)*(a)* of the Supplementary Benefit (Single Payments) Regulations 1981 — are, broadly, as follows:

i. claimants whose move is necessary in that they satisfied the conditions, elsewhere in the regulations, for help with removal expenses (for example because of bereavement, divorce or marital breakdown or because the existing home is unhealthy, unsafe or overcrowded);

ii. claimants with a pensioner, child, pregnant woman or chronically sick or disabled person in the family;

iii. claimants with no immediate prospect of employment where they have (or the claimant's partner has) been receiving supplementary benefit continuously for six months;

iv. claimants who have just come out of prison, long-stay hospital or other institution.

Claimants in groups (iii) and (iv) only are also subject to the condition that there is no suitable alternative furnished accommodation available in the area. Under the SBC before 24 November 1980, payments for people moving home could be made, broadly, to people in groups (ii), (iii) and (iv) above — and also to those moving home because of bereavement, divorce or marital breakdown (but not the other categories included in group (i)) — without applying the condition of no suitable alternative furnished accommodation. Other claimants could receive help only if they were prevented by lack of essential items from moving out of accommodation which caused them serious hardship or risk to health, and provided that there was no suitable alternative furnished accommodation.

The current rules therefore apply the condition about alternative furnished accommodation to some fit, childless

claimants below pension age to whom it did not apply under the SBC; on the other hand, the payments can now be made, without applying the alternative furnished accommodation condition, to a wider group of claimants whose move is necessary (as in group (i) above).

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will take steps to ensure that single payments for furniture, where a claimant is moving to unfurnished accommodation, are made before or as soon as possible after the move.

Mr. Whitney: Paragraph 7218 of the S manual (a copy of which is in the Library) already instructs local offices to make every effort to ensure that, prior to removal, a single payment is awarded for all items for which the need can be determined before the move. Local offices are aware of the need to identify such claims and to give them priority.

Mr. Cowans asked the Secretary of State for Social Services in what respects the information about single payments for furniture in leaflet SB16 are inaccurate.

Mr. Newton: The leaflet gives a simple and comprehensible guide to the circumstances in which people on supplementary benefit are entitled to lump sum payments for special needs; it makes clear that it is not a full and authoritative statement of the law. We have recently revised the leaflet to improve its clarity and to take account of changes to the rules. The revised leaflet will be published on 26 November and copies will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Cowans asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what action he has taken to ensure that adjudication officers are aware of the rules governing entitlement to single payments for furniture, in view of the low level of knowledge revealed in a survey of supplementary benefit officers by Mr. Richard Berthoud of the Policy Studies Institute.

Mr. Newton: It is for the chief adjudication officer to issue guidance to adjudication officers about the supplementary benefit regulations, and we have no power to intervene. Guidance on the regulations governing entitlement to single payments for furniture is contained in chapter 7 (in particular at paragraphs 7171 to 7227) of the S manual, a copy of which is in the Library. Since the survey was carried out by the Policy Studies Institute further guidance has been issued this year by the chief adjudication officer in circulars S8/84 and S19/84, copies of which are in the Library. My hon. Friend is at present chairing a review—to which the Policy Studies Institute has presented evidence — which is considering the structure of the supplementary benefit scheme as a whole and ways in which the scheme might be administered more effectively.

NHS (Regional General Managers)

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many of the National Health Service regional general managers have been appointed from within their own regions; and in how many cases their former posts are being kept open for them on an informal or formal basis in case their appointment is not renewed.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Ten of the 12 regional general managers appointed so far come from within their own authority with pre-existing contracts. These contracts contain pre-existing rights which are retained during and beyond the period of the additional contract as general manager. They do not guarantee a return to the former post held if the general manager contract is not renewed.

Geriatric Care (South Tyneside)

Mr. Dixon asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what steps he is taking to reduce the waiting list for geriatric beds in south Tyneside;

(2) what mechanisms he has for monitoring and evaluating standards of care for elderly persons in south Tyneside.

Mr. John Patten: South Tyneside health authority is responsible for the provision of health services in its area, and I understand that it is currently considering what changes it should be making in services for the elderly. Its plans, when endorsed by the regional health authority, will form the basis for monitoring performance and achievements in the review process. If the hon. Member wants any further information, he may care to contact the chairman of the health authority.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Temple-Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will make a statement on progress being made on take-up of housing benefit supplement by those eligible to receive it;

(2) whether he is satisfied with the role being played by local authorities in encouraging take-up of housing benefit supplement; and if there are any plans to change or revise that role.

Mr. Whitney: The Department has provided a formula to assist local authorities in the identification of pensioners who might qualify for housing benefit supplement or supplementary benefit; and work is continuing to find a suitable formula to cover non-pensioners. The administration of the housing benefits scheme is the responsibility of individual local authorities who must decide what degree of priority to attach to this area of work. There are no plans to make changes in advance of the report of the independent housing benefit review, which is due by the end of this year.

Mr. Temple-Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the present practices with regard to back-dating of claims for housing benefit supplement; to when they are back-dated; and if there are any plans to change these practices.

Mr. Whitney: Where a claim for standard housing benefit is made within one month of the notification that a claim for supplementary benefit has been unsuccessful entitlement to housing benefit supplement will be backdated to the date of the supplementary benefit claim. Where an unsuccessful claim for supplementary benefit falls within one month of the notification of entitlement to standard housing benefit, housing benefit supplement will be backdated to the date of the claim for standard housing benefit. Where a person can show that there was good cause for his failure to claim supplementary benefit earlier housing benefit supplement may be backdated and paid for a period before the claim was received.

There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Mr. Temple-Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to announce the findings of the review of the housing benefit scheme.

Mr. Whitney: The review team has been asked to report by the end of the year. It is expected that the Government's conclusions will be published in the early part of 1985.

Single-parent Families (Income)

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish figures, using November 1984 benefit rates, and tabulating net weekly spending power for a lone mother with two children aged six and eight years living in local authority accommodation and paying average local authority rent and rates, in each of the following circumstances *(a)* not in paid work, drawing long-term supplementary benefit, *(b)* working part-time earning £24 a week and drawing long-term supplementary benefit and *(c)* working full-time with £25 weekly work expenses and earning the average for female manual earners, and also three-quarters and one-and-a-half times average for female manual earners.

Mr. Whitney: The information requested is given in the following table:

November 1984

Lone mother with two children aged six and eight years	*Net weekly spending power £*
(a) In receipt of long-term supplementary benefit	60·10
(b) Working part-time and earning £24 net a week and in receipt of long-term supplementary benefit	72·10
(c) Working full-time with £25 weekly work expenses earning:	
(i) Average for female manual earners;	64·24
(ii) Three-quarters average for female manual earners	65·92
(iii) One-and-a-half times average for female manual earners	82·09

Notes:

(1) Average gross earnings for female manual earners are assumed to be £96·92 a week;

(2) The general assumptions in the April 1984 DHSS tax-benefit model tables apply except that rent is assumed to be £15·60 a week and general rates £5·85 a week.

Joint Finance Expenditure

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services to what extent the disregard from grant penalties has assisted in the management of joint finance expenditure.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The disregard from grant penalties was first announced in December 1983 and effective in April 1984. It relieves authorities of grant holdback penalties they may otherwise incur in respect of increases in spending on projects to which health authorities are contributing under the joint finance arrangements. It provides further encouragement to authorities to continue their participation in jointly financed projects. We expect uptake of joint finance to continue at a high level.

Community Care

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information is available in his Department as to the extent of the transfer of funds with patients on transfer from hospital to community care by the health service throughout England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: I can answer only in relation to England. Thirteen projects have so far been selected for central support as part of the care in the community pilot projects programme, involving some 500 patients. A further batch of projects will be selected in the new year. We have now received in all some 230 applications and we understand some of these projects may go ahead with local funding.

The position in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what other departments of Her Majesty's Government have provided assistance and support in implementing the Government's community care policies.

Mr. John Patten: People being cared for in the community receive assistance and support from the programmes of many other Government Departments either directly or through local authorities or other local bodies. The fields concerned include housing (Department of the Environment) fare concessions and other forms of assistance with transport (Department of Transport), further education and recreation facilities (Department of Education and Science) sheltered employment and support projects involving unemployed people (Department of Employment and Manpower Services Commission) and support for voluntary organisations (Home Office). In addition, certain relevant tax concessions are available from the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services to what extent Government policies on manpower limitations by local authorities have affected care in the community initiatives.

Mr. John Patten: Local authorities have been advised, in agreement with the local authority associations, that Government policy on manpower should not be an obstacle to the transfer of resources to community care since staff whose employment is financed by NHS funds do not add to the rate burden.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if his Department has sought the views of the Association of County Councils on the recent trend by health authorities to establish their own community-based services, such as community units for the mentally-handicapped.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. and learned Friend has recently received a letter on this topic from the chairman of the social services committee of the Association of County Councils. He hopes to reply shortly. We will send copies of the correspondence to my hon. Friend.

Hospital Returns

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what changes were made in the compilation or validation of annual hospital returns in 1979 prior to or as part of the central computerisation of the returns.

Mr. John Patten: The main changes made to the compilation of the annual hospital statistical return (Form SH3) in 1979 were as follows:

i. separate figures relating to private patients in NHS hospitals were removed from this return and collected separately on Form SBH211.

ii. separate figures on the numbers of healthy persons lodged at hospitals were no longer collected.

iii. figures on individual specialist units (eg burns units, spinal injuries units) were recorded separately. Previously figures on some of these units were recorded under recognised main specialties and others were aggregated centrally under one category.

Details of these changes were given in health notices HN(79)19 and HN(79)99, copies of which are available in the Library.

The validation process remained unchanged in 1979, but the computer was used where possible to perform validation checks previously carried out manually.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 16 November 1984

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Port Stanley Hospital

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about progress on the new Port Stanley hospital.

Mr. Raison: The architect responsible for the outline design of the new hospital has recently held detailed discussions about his proposals with all interested parties in Port Stanley. I expect to receive his final report and recommendations shortly. We shall then, in consultation with the Falkland Islands Government, proceed with arrangements for the new development as quickly as possible.

Ethiopia

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is satisfied that United Kingdom food aid to famine-stricken areas in Ethiopia has reached the areas in Ethiopia and Tigre not under the control of the Ethiopia Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: The United Kingdom's food aid to Ethiopia has been sent both direct to the Ethiopian Government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission and to voluntary agencies working in all the areas affected by drought, including Eritrea and Tigre.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Shops Act 1950

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the report of the committee of inquiry into proposals to amend the Shops Act; and what proposals he has to amend the Shops Act 1950.

Mr. Fox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the report of the committee of inquiry into proposals to amend the Shops Act 1950.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to publish the report next week. He will need to study the Committee's recommendations and reactions to the report before reaching any decisions on future legislation.

Passports

Mr. Proctor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out the cost of re-issuing *(a)* an individual passport and *(b)* all passports on expiry in the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I understand my hon. Friend's question to relate to issue of new documents to persons who have previously held passports. No records are maintained showing the number of these transactions. Various factors will, in any case, affect the time and cost involved in providing individual passport services at home and overseas which would make calculation of their costs extremely difficult and inevitably imprecise.

Mr. Edward Hopson

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how *(a)* the consultant psychiatrist and *(b)* the probation officer exercised their supervision of Mr. Edward Hopson, following his conditional discharge from Broadmoor in April 1982; how often he was seen by each; how many reports his Department received from each; on what dates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I understand from the supervising consultant psychiatrist that he saw Mr. Hopson at Broadmoor on seven occasions after his conditional discharge. He carried out his supervision by means of these consultations and by regular contact with the supervising probation officers. My right hon. and learned Friend received seven reports from him in April, August and November 1982, in February, August and December 1983 and in June 1984.

I understand from the Chief Probation Officer of Middlesex that the probation officers responsible for Mr. Hopson's supervision maintained regular contact with him, on an average of once every two weeks, by interviews with him at their offices or at his home. Until March 1983, Mr. Hopson was living at a hostel and in daily contact with experienced hostel staff. Reports were received from supervising probation officers by my right hon. and learned Friend in June, August and November 1982, in February, March, July and November 1983, and in March and September 1984.

Picket Line Arrests

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department from what services the 11 persons described as service men in the answer of 12 November about arrests on picket line duty, *Official Report*, column 70, came.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Ten were members of local authority fire brigades, and one was a naval rating. All were off duty when the arrests were made.

ENERGY

Farms (Overhead Power Cables)

Viscount Cranborne asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether, in view of the increasing height of agricultural machinery and equipment, he is satisfied with the present regulations about overhead power cables around farms and farmbuildings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I am satisfied that the statutory clearances from the ground of overhead electricity lines are generally appropriate. The safe use of farm machinery in the vicinity of such lines is kept under review by the National Farmers Union and the electricity supply industry, and also by the Health and Safety Executive and my own engineering inspectorate, both of which statutorily receive reports of accidents. It is generally

agreed that the most effective and efficient way of reducing the very small number of farming accidents due to contact with electricity lines is by encouraging safe working methods. Much publicity and other help are available to that end.

Conservation

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the specific projects concerned with energy conservation which are supported by his Department.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

Lamsac Project: Design and implementation of energy management systems for local authorities.

Voluntary organisations community insulation projects scheme.

Heat scheme.

"Energy matters" home energy audit scheme.

Energy efficiency demonstration scheme.

Monitoring and target-setting scheme.

Energy management groups.

National energy management advisory committee.

National energy management conference and exhibition.

The coal firing scheme.

Training courses and workshops.

Research and development programmes (domestic, non-domestic and industrial).

Combined heat and power and district heating lead city studies.

WALES

Pig Industry

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied with the present state of the pig industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: In Wales the pig breeding herd has continued to decline, the provisional census figures for June 1984 show a fall of 18 per cent. in the breeding herd since June 1983 and now stands at around 14,300 head. However, there are indications that the situation is changing with a slight increase in the size of breeding herd anticipated.

Dairy Farming

Mr. Geraint Howells asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy towards those dairy farmers who have applied under the outgoers scheme but have been rejected; and whether they will be given time to apply for special case consideration.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: No dairy producers who have made valid applications within the terms of the outgoers scheme have yet been rejected. Besides those currently being invited to join the scheme under the first tranche of offers, a further second tranche of offers has now been made to other producers in a higher production band to include those with quotas of up to 250,000 litres. All those who have applied to be outgoers have, like all other milk producers, been able to apply at the same time for special case consideration and many have done so.

Education Authorities

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the amount of extra cash allocated to Welsh local education authorities consequent upon the autumn statement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Stradling Thomas: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not yet decided on the allocation of his resources to particular services, including education, for 1985-86. His decisions will be made known in due course.

Water Rates

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the cash rise in Welsh water rates consequent upon the autumn statement of 12 November; what is the total cash sum involved; by what percentage water rates may rise; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Welsh water authority has yet to finalise its budget for 1985-86. This will take account not only of the changes in external financing limits included in the Chancellor's autumn statement, but of performance aims yet to be agreed and the financial target still to be set for the authority for 1985-86. While discussions with the authority on these matters will be continuing, I expect the increase in main charges to be above the rate of inflation.

Food Surpluses

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the Welsh locations used for the storage of European Economic Community food surpluses.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: On 30 September 1984 stocks of surplus European Economic Community food were located as follows:

Skimmed Milk Powder: Ammanford, Cwmbran, Narbeth, Barry, St. Clears, Swansea (2), Llandyssul (2), Caerphilly, Pembroke, Tregaron, Eglwyswrw, Overton, Hawarden

Butter: Cardiff(2), Newport, Rhyl, Swansea

Beef: Cardiff, Rhyl

Note: Numbers in brackets after place names indicate where there is more than one store in a location.

Housing Improvement Grants

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many housing improvement grants he expects to be paid in Wales and Mid-Glamorgan, respectively during 1984-85 and 1985-86.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Latest returns indicate that £81 million will be spent on renovation grants in Wales in 1984-85 of which mid-Glamorgan local authorities will spend £22 million. The amount spent in 1985-86 will be a matter for local authorities to decide in the light of their priorities and the resources available.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the total number of applicants waiting for housing improvement grants in Mid-Glamorgan at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: At 30 June 1984, the number of applications for housing renovation grants awaiting approval was approximately 21,000.

Factory Employees

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of employees currently working in factories constructed by the Welsh Development Agency.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I have asked the Welsh Development Agency to provide the information requested to the hon. Gentleman.

Health Authorities (Ancillary Services)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales which health authorities in Wales have indicated their intention not to put out to tender ancillary services.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: None.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales which catering and laundry companies have declined to tender for appropriate services despite *(a)* receiving an invitation or *(b)* seeking information on the proposed tender within the National Health Service in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Four companies have declined to tender. It would not be appropriate to disclose their names.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Coal Industry Dispute

Mr. Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he or his officials have had with the British Steel Corporation regarding the seeking of injunctions by the corporation against secondary picketing of its installations in the current miners' dispute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Secretary of State and I have naturally been kept in close touch by the chairman of the British Steel Corporation with issues arising from the miners' dispute. The Government have made it clear that they would not wish to discourage any employer from using the legal rememdies which are now available as a result of the employment legislation. Action under these provisions must, however, be a matter for the judgment of the particular management concerned.

Manufactured Goods

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has about categories of manufactured goods which were made in the United Kingdom in 1972 and which are no longer manufactured in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fletcher: Techological change and trends in fashion ensure that there is a constant stream of products becoming outmoded, outdated or unprofitable, but there is no central register which would provide a list of these. The same forces ensure the development of new products based upon the exploitation of new materials, and techniques and this has led over recent years to the introduction of such items as fibre-optic cables, home micro-computers, video cassettes and recorders, and many more.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Bright asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements the Government are making to help secure consistency when responsibility for trading standards and related functions is devolved to the districts, as indicated in paragraph 2.13.1 of the paper placed in the Library by the Secretary of State for the Environment on 31 July.

Mr. Fletcher: The White Paper "Streamlining the Cities" (Cmnd. 9063) proposed that, on abolition of the metropolitan county councils, responsibility for trading standards and related functions should be devolved to the district councils, but stressed the importance of consistent standards of enforcement across each metropolitan county. This point was emphasised in responses to consultation.

In the more detailed document on transfer of functions published in July, the Government said that they were considering what measures might be appropriate to help secure such consistent standards of enforcement. They have now decided to include in the Local Government Bill a provision requiring the district councils in each metropolitan county to set up a committee whose function it will be to seek to co-ordinate enforcement and the use of specialist staff and facilities employed on enforcement work.

My right hon. Friend hopes that these committees will be instrumental in:

a. ensuring that all district councils within their area adopt common levels of enforcement activity, and common interpretation of statutes for both advice and prosecution work;

b. maintaining or developing physical facilities (such as testing stations and laboratory services) for trading standards activities on a shared basis for the district councils within their area;

c. establishing a co-ordinated approach to the staffing of the service within their area.

Mr. Ian MacGregor

Mr. Gregory asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the review committee responsible for assessing the performance payments due to Lazard Frères of New York in respect of Mr. Ian MacGregor's chairmanship of the British Steel Corporation has reached a decision on the first performance payment.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Government and Lazard Frères of New York have agreed to defer any decision on the first performance payment. The review committee has therefore been asked to defer its decision on the first payment until the same time as its decision on the second payment, which is due to be made next year, after BSC's results to end-March 1985 are known.

EMPLOYMENT

Information Technology Centre, Welwyn Hatfield

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for Employment what consideration will be given to the provision of an information technology centre for Welwyn Hatfield district.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government have agreed the setting up of a total of 175 information technology centres funded jointly by the Manpower Services Commission and the Department of Trade and Industry over the period 1981 to 1985. Sites have been found for all 175 centres in the programme and no further applications can therefore be considered.

SCOTLAND

Labour Statistics

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, by postal code district, the latest

unemployment figures within the Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy travel-to-work areas; and if he will show for each postal code district the change in unemployment over the preceding 12-month period.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Information by post-code sector is not available for the recently redefined travel-to-work areas of Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy. The following table shows the number of unemployed claimants by post-code sector for each of the jobcentre areas which formerly comprised the travel-to-work areas of Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy at 11 October 1984, the latest date for which information is available, and the change they represent compared with the figures at the corresponding date last year.

Dunfermline travel-to-work area

	Unemployed claimants	*Change*
Cowdenbeath		
KY 4 0	453	+65
KY 4 8	347	+36
KY 4 9	592	+95
KY 5 0	562	−6
KY 5 8	708	+90
KY 5 9	483	+79
KY13 7	312	+48
Total	3,457	+407
Dunfermline		
KY11 1	390	+34
KY11 2	579	+70
KY11 3	193	+56
KY11 4	1,017	+50
KY11 5	406	+78
KY12 0	393	+60
KY12 7	192	+15
KY12 8	514	+49
KY12 9	610	+55
Total	4,294	+467

Kirkcaldy travel-to-work area

	Unemployed claimants	*Change*
Glenrothes		
KY 6 1	403	+16
KY 6 2	638	−24
KY 6.3	258	+34
KY 7 4	630	−28
KY 7 5	311	+2
KY 7 6	562	+16
Total	2,802	+16
Kirkcaldy		
KY 1 1	396	+1
KY 1 2	537	+46
KY 1 3	478	+97
KY 2 5	619	−1
KY 2 6	1,185	+36
KY 3 0	256	+9
KY 3 9	301	+35
Total	3,772	+223
Leven		
KY 1 4	272	+1
KY 8 1	380	−25
KY 8 2	558	−34
KY 8 3	525	+46
KY 8 4	435	+32
KY 8 5	724	−39
KY 8 6	95	+12
Total	2,989	−7

Note:
The individual post coded figures include estimated additions for the small number of unemployed claimants previously categorised as "unallocated" within the travel-to-work area.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Butter Exports

Sir Peter Mills asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he will take to overcome the problems of exporting United Kingdom butter to West Germany.

Mrs. Fenner: The basic problem is that the Federal Republic of Germany requires official veterinary certification on matters outside the knowledge of our state veterinary service. We are pressing the German authorities to adopt a different approach.

Potatoes

Mr. William Powell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tonnes, at what public cost and for what reason, of potatoes have been spoilt with dye to make them unfit for human consumption in 1984 and in each of the preceding four years.

Mr. MacGregor: The Agriculture Act 1957 empowers the Government to provide potato producers in the United Kingdom with guaranteed prices or assured markets.

No separate payments are made to the Potato Marketing Board for potatoes disposed of for stockfeed. The quantities of potatoes so disposed of as part of the guarantee arrangements during the crop years 1980-84, and the total public expenditure cost of market support, are as follows:

Crop Year	*'000 tonnes*	*£ million*
1980	496	15·7
1981	—	—
1982	224	*8·0
1983	—	—
1984	†10	—

* Including loans of £5·9 million.
† To 9 November 1984.

Agriculture Council

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Agriculture Council meeting held in Brussels on 12 and 13 November.

Mr. Jopling [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 November 1984, c. 295]: I am now in a position to make a further statement about the collection of milk supplementary levy. I understand that the Commission has now decided to extend by 10 days the time allowed for the first levy payment, so that it would have more time to consider what to do. In the meantime, the intervention board will not be calling for the payment of levy. I understand that the Milk

Marketing Board for Northern Ireland will be making its November payments to producers without any levy deductions.

DEFENCE

Trident

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimated total cost of the Trident project.

Mr. Butler: I have nothing to add to the answer which my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) on 13 November, at c. *520-21*.

PRIME MINISTER

International Youth Year

Mr. Alton asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement outlining Government proposals for International Youth Year.

The Prime Minister: The Government are directly supporting International Youth Year by grant aiding the co-ordinating committees in the United Kingdom. Many other activities in Government programmes have relevance to the objectives of the year, including existing grants in connection with youth participation, and support of a visit of 250 young people from 22 Europen countries.

NATIONAL FINANCE

EC Finance Council

Mr. Fallon asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the meeting of the European Community Finance Council in Brussels on 12 November.

Mr. Lawson: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) on 14 November at c. *350*. I have placed copies of the Council's common position on the measures necessary to guarantee the effective application of budgetary discipline in the Library of the House.

Book Seizures

Mr. Dobson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what information he has as to which of the books seized from Gay's the Word bookshop and kept by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise are obtainable in other bookshops and public libraries;

(2) how many of the books seized from Gay's the Word bookshop and kept by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise have been the subject of prosecutions under the Obscene Publications Act;

(3) how many officers of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise were involved in the raids connected with Gay's the Word bookshop; and how many have been involved in reading the books;

(4) if he will list the books seized from the Gay's the Word bookshop; the numbers of copies of each book, together with the list of books returned; and the number of copies.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Hard Riding Hats

Mr. Greenway asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated value added tax yield on British Standard Institute approved standard of hard riding hats in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Wales (Gross National Product)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the present rate of growth of the gross national product of Wales; and how this compares with the figure for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Peter Rees: The latest available estimates of gross domestic product at current prices for Wales and comparative figures for the United Kingdom are:

£ million

	Wales	*United Kingdom*
1978	6,242	146,962
1979	7,115	170,174
1980	8,085	198,440
1981	8,580	214,793
1982	9,131	232,503

Regional estimates are made in current prices only. Care should therefore be taken in comparing the derived growth rates from the above figures, because they include the effect both of price rises and of changes in real output.

Hotels

Mr. Freeson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what activities of hotels are categorised as non-trading for tax purposes;

(2) what activities of guest houses are categorised as non-trading for tax purposes;

(3) what activities of boarding houses are categorised as non-trading for tax purposes.

Mr. Lawson [*pursuant to the reply*, 15 November 1984, c. *351*]: None as such. I can assure the right hon. Member that hotels, boarding houses and guest houses within the generally understood meaning of these terms are likely to be trading. But it is the nature of the activity and not the description of the establishment that determines the tax treatment.

Funding

Mr. Gould asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the extent of over-funding or under-funding for each quarter since the beginning of 1982; what have been the total sales of commercial bills for each quarter over the same period; and what has been the sterling index, the level of industrial production and the level of real wages for each quarter over the same period.

Mr. Ian Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 November 1984, c. *90*]: Under and over funding can be defined in a number of different ways. Quarterly data on the PSBR and purchases of public sector debt by the United Kingdom private sector (other than banks) and the external finance of the public sector are in table 11.3 of the September *Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin*.

Data for total sales of commercial bills are not available. Table 5 of the September 1984 *Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin* provides the closest approximation; it shows acceptances, mainly of commercial bills, granted by the banks to United Kingdom residents at mid quarter dates. Net transactions in commercial bills by the issue department are shown for calendar quarters in table 1.6 of the October edition of "Financial Statistics".

Quarterly data for the sterling index are in the table on page 50 of *Economic Trends*, and data on the level of industrial production are in *Economic Trends* page 26.

There is more than one definition of real wages. *Economic Trends* page 40 shows quarterly data on wage rates and earnings. Quarterly data on retail prices are given on page 42 of the same publication.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Closures

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out in the *Official Report* a précis of his reasons for rejecting proposals put forward by local education authorities to close and amalgamate secondary schools pursuant to the Education Act 1980.

Mr. Dunn: In the limited number of cases where my right hon. Friend or his predecessor have rejected proposals made by local education authorities pursuant to the Education Act to close or amalgamate secondary schools it was only after most careful consideration of all the relevant financial, educational and other factors. As I explained to the right hon. Member in reply to his earlier question on 12 November 1984 at column *62*, among the reasons for rejection were that the proposals were not in their view in accord with their policies set out in circulars 2/80, 2/81 and 4/82, copies of which I am sending to the right hon. Member. Proposals that have been rejected have failed to take account of the general policies of my right hon. Friend and his predecessor on the curriculum and examinations, and sustaining a balance between the county and voluntary sectors, appropriate to each area, or of their particular policies of not normally approving proposals that would lead to closure or significant change of character of schools with sixth forms of proven worth; or of the need to pay particular regard to parental preference on religious or other grounds for maintaining opportunities for single sex education. Most of the proposals listed in my previous answer were rejected for one or more of these reasons and, according to the circumstances of the case, decisions may also have been influenced by factors such as the inadequacy of consultation or the extent to which amalgamated schools would have been housed in split site premises that were judged unacceptable because of particular educational and organisational difficulties that would have arisen.

Students (Parental Contribution)

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what slice of gross residual income will be required to cover the parental contribution in 1985 for parents with combined gross residual incomes of £26,000, £25,000, £24,000, £23,000, £22,000, £21,000, £20,000, £19,000, £18,000, £17,000, £16,000, £15,000, £14,000, £13,000, £12,000, £11,000 and £10,000, allowing for a normal pattern of taxation and national insurance payments for parents taxed jointly with none, one, two or three additional dependent children.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which my right hon. Friend gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 14 November 1984 at columns *238-39*. The Department does not collect information on the tax and national insurance payments of the parents of mandatory award holders. The assessed parental contributions in 1985-86 for families with no other dependent children will be as follows:

Residual Income £	*Assessed Parental Contribution* £	*Per cent.*
10,000	291	2·9
11,000	474	4·3
12,000	674	5·6
13,000	874	6·7
14,000	1,074	7·7
15,000	1,274	8·5
16,000	1,524	9·5
17,000	1,774	10·4
18,000	2,024	11·2
19,000	2,274	12·0
20,000	2,524	12·6
21,000	2,774	13·2
22,000	3,024	13·7
23,000	3,274	14·2
24,000	3,524	14·7
25,000	3,774	15·1
26,000	4,000	15·4

The contribution payable in each case may be less than the amounts shown in the scale, particularly at its top end. This will depend on the amount of the award (maintenance and fees) towards which the contribution has to be made and whether any of the assessed contribution is offset by allowances for other dependent children.

Decisions have not yet been taken on the level of deductions from parental contributions in 1985-86 in respect of other dependent children in the family.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Reform

Mr. Burt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the Government's proposals for the administration and servicing of the outstanding debt of the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils if those councils are abolished.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: We have taken account of representations received on our White Paper "Streamlining the Cities" (Cmnd. 9063), and our present proposals differ in several respects.

We said in the White Paper that it is not possible to construct an equitable basis for distributing the external

debt of the authorities to be abolished between successor bodies and that administration of the external debt would therefore need to remain the responsibility of a single administering body in each area. There may be some exceptions to that, for which we shall make provision if appropriate, but for the most part we hold to that view. The proposal in the White Paper was that that single body should be a lead district in each metropolitan area but a specially constituted residuary body in Greater London. We have subsequently announced that we intend to establish residuary bodies for each area, though outside London it will still be possible for a lead district to take on the debt function from the outset if all the authorities concerned agree.

The White paper said that the guiding principle for servicing the debt would be that responsibility for making sufficient payments to the body administering the debt should be transferred with the asset to which the debt relates. This was the principle followed in the reorganisation carried out under the Local Government Act 1972. On further reflection, however, we believe that it would be very complicated to make such arrangemens in the present case, since there is no single body which is the main successor to each of the outgoing authorities.

We therefore now propose a different approach, which we believe will be as equitable as an asset-based attribution could be whilst being considerably simpler to arrange. The system would be as follows.

Debt servicing arrangements for assets already transferred, notably former GLC housing, would continue unchanged and would also be applied to analogous transfers made at the time of abolition.

All remaining external debt managed by the administering body would be viewed as a single sum, for which a repayment period would be calculated equal to the average of the repayment periods of all the individual amounts of debt constituting the sum. Responsibility for servicing various tranches of this sum would be attributed in three ways.

First, tranches would be earmarked as being associated with the loans, including house purchase advances, made by the authority being abolished. Bodies inheriting the outgoing authority's rights and liabilities in relation to such loans — including in appropriate cases the debt administering body itself—would be required to service an amount of debt equal to the amount outstanding at the time of abolition on the loans transferred to it.

Second, a tranche would be attributed where appropriate to the new single service authorities which are to be established on abolition. This would in each case reflect the amount of debt outstanding against the service in question at 31 March 1983, the end of the financial year immediately prior to the announcement of the Government's intention to abolish the authorities concerned, adjusted to take account of repayments and of new borrowing for capital expenditure on that service from that date to the date of abolition.

Third, responsibility for servicing the residue of the sum would be attributed to the boroughs or districts in each area pro-rata to the population at a specified date as close as possible to the date of abolition.

The foregoing arrangements are concerned with external debt. In some of the authorities to be abolished there will also be debt to internal capital funds. The White Paper proposed that such debt would be extinguished at abolition. This is still our proposal. There is no corresponding external debt, and therefore no need for the successor authorities to make contributions to the debt administering body on account of such debt.

We are very conscious of the importance of securing the interests of lenders. Under existing arrangements, all loan debt is an equal charge on the revenues of the borrowing authority. This situation will be preserved after abolition. We propose that the external debt shall be a charge on the revenues of the body administering it, while the bodies responsible for servicing the debt will be treated for the purposes of the charge on their revenues as if they had borrowed the sums involved from the administering body. In this way I believe that lenders may have confidence that their interests will be unaffected.

I shall be writing today to the local authority associations inviting them to comment on these proposals before final decisions are taken.

Mr. Hayes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements are proposed to maintain the existing Greater London council and metropolitan county council central data bases after the abolition of those councils.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The GLC and metropolitan county councils have provided focal points for the collection and assembly of data on a wide range of topics which have been drawn on by various other bodies. It is envisaged that the borough and metropolitan district councils will need to continue to collect, and have access to, at least some of this information on a consistent London or country-wide basis to support the proper exercise of their enhanced functions.

To facilitate this we intend that the Local Government Bill should provide new powers for each borough or district council to assist in the collection of information on matters concerning part or the whole of the metropolitan area. In addition, where a two thirds majority of the borough or district councils in an area decide that specific information needs to be collected, each council will have a duty to collect the information and to provide it to any other borough or district or appropriate Minister on request. Finally, if any council fails to co-operate in the collection of this information there will be powers for another borough or district, subject to the agreement of the two thirds majority, to collect the information and to recover the costs from the defaulting authority.

These measures will ensure that the successor authorities are able to co-operate to maintain the London or county-wide coverage of those existing GLC and MCC data bases which they consider necessary. This will be particularly important in the field of highways and traffic management, where the Department of Transport has similar data needs, as well as land-use planning. In London it is envisaged that the London Planning Commission will also have a useful role to play in the collection and analysis of information on matters affecting London as a whole.

Mr. Hayes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements will be made to ensure continued running of services provided by the Greater London council and metropolitan county councils under general powers in the event of abolition.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Local Government Bill will provide for the transfer of specific statutory functions of

the GLC and MCCs to the borough and district councils, or to other bodies. It will not, however, deal with general powers which are available, under existing legislation, to both county and district councils, or to both the GLC and the London borough councils.

Both the White Paper (Cmnd. 9063) and the more detailed paper about our proposals which we published in July referred to a number of activities of the GLC/MCCs under each power. We indicated that it would be for the successor bodies to decide how best to obtain these services for themselves. However, we suggested that they might consider joint arrangements where these would be efficient in the use of specialist staff and facilities. We have also said that there might be a role for the residuary bodies in maintaining some services of this kind for their own use and, on a repayment basis, as a service to others.

In the course of consultations on our proposals a number of these services have been suggested as suitable for retention as units, including central purchasing, scientific services, including county analysts' laboratories, general purpose computing and information facilities and systems, derelict land reclamation teams, and the GLC's specialist housing repair and improvement teams.

We remain convinced that decisions on the future of these services should properly be taken by the borough/district councils, and where appropriate other successor bodies. The Department of the Environment will, however, be prepared to use its good offices in considering how best worthwhile work of this kind might be maintained if there is a demand for this from the successor bodies. If permanent arrangements cannot be made in good time we envisage that the residuary bodies could maintain the existing services for a transitional period. In any event we expect that the ownership and operation of general-purpose computers will initially need to be transferred to the residuary bodies.

It will, of course, be essential, if the Department is to be able to help in this way, that the GLC/MCCs should authorise the officers responsible for these services to provide information to, and to enter into discussion with, the Department.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will outline the parameters of the proposed study of the local government system of finance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) on 26 October 1984 at column 747.

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many changes there have been to the grant structure of local government finance since 1959.

Mr. Waldegrave: There have been two major changes since 1959. The first was made in the Local Government Act 1966, which was amended by the Local Government Act 1974 to take account of the re-organisation of local government in that year. The second was made in the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980.

Brent Council

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for the Environment in what way he has been told by Brent borough council that it is its intention to tailor its expenditure to live within the limits he has set; and what information he has as to how the council took such a decision.

Mr. Waldegrave: I was informed by the leader of Brent council in a letter dated 13 August 1984 that it was the intention of the Conservative minority administration to keep within the expenditure limit which I have set for 1985-86.

I have no further information.

Housing Subsidy

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to issue to the local authority associations consultation papers on housing subsidy for 1985-86.

Mr. Gow: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and Secretary of State for Wales have issued consultation papers today. The first concerns the Government's proposals for calculating the increase which local authorities will be expected to find from local sources in arriving at their entitlement to housing subsidy for 1985-86. The second concerns the amount of management and maintenance expenditure to be treated as reckonable for housing subsidy purposes in 1985-86. Copies of the papers have been placed in the Vote Office and in the Libraries of both Houses.

Carsington (Embankment Dam)

Mr. Parris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received the report of the investigation which he set up into the failure during the construction of the embankment dam at Carsington; and what action he proposes to take.

Mr. Gow: I have placed in the Library copies of a first report by Mr. R. E. Coxon, BSc, DIC, FICE, on the failure of the Carsington embankment.

Mr. Coxon's interim conclusions include the following:

The dam failed on the upstream slope before reservoir impounding began. If it had occurred on first filling the water level would have been substantially below the crest at the time and breaching of the bank would have been very improbable.

The investigation work on the slide has been both extensive and thorough, carefully and diligently pursued.

Testing of materials has been properly performed and monitored; some further testing of samples remains to be completed.

The work has provided a sound basis for judgements to be made on the cause and should prove adequate when fully analysed to establish the data on which remedial works can be safely based.

Appropriate measures have been taken throughout to safeguard personnel and works, and to leave the site in a secure state for the winter season.

The design of remedial works will have to include a number of factors not discussed in detail in this report. These include economics, the effects of proximate ancillary structures and the need to modify or relocate them, the provision for treatment of the foundations in relation to the remedial works proposed, and the geochemical properties of the embankment, foundation and reservoir and their effect on design and water quality.

I shall study carefully these and Mr. Coxon's other conclusions. Meanwhile I have the assurance of the chairman of the Severn-Trent water authority that he will consult me before any reconstruction measures are put in hand.

Mr. Coxon expects to present his final report in the Spring of 1985.

Performing Arts

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what further consideration he has given to the grant-related expenditure methodologies for the arts; what further consideration he intends to give; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Minister for the Arts.

Grant-related expenditure methodologies generally are kept under regular review as part of the preparations for the annual rate support grant settlements. Detailed studies of the GRE methodology for the library service are continuing, and it is proposed similarly to examine the museum service GRE shortly. There is no separate GRE for other arts expenditure at present. As regards the possibility of developments in that respect, I refer the hon. Member to the reply sent by my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts to the Chairman of the Education Science and Arts Select Committee on 31 July last.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Unemployed Persons (Benefits)

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average amount of total benefit paid to unemployed persons with a spouse and *(a)* two children, *(b)* four children and *(c)* five children and over.

Mr. Whitney: Information in the form requested is not available. However, the table gives the standard rates of unemployment benefit plus child benefit at the rate of £6·50 per child (£6·85 from November 1984) and equivalent supplementary benefit rates for those whose resources are not otherwise sufficient.

	Unemployment benefit plus child benefit		*Supplementary benefit including child benefit*	
	November 1983	*November 1984*	*November 1983*	*November 1984*
	£	£	£	£
Couple plus 2 children (1 over 11, 1 under 11)	57·05	59·70	66·35	69·50
Couple plus 4 children (2 over 11, 2 under 11)	70·35	73·40	89·20	93·45
Couple plus 5 children (2 over 11, 3 under 11)	77·00	80·25	98·35	103·05

For a family with more than five children, unemployment benefit currently increases by 15p per child, but the child dependency addition will be abolished from 26 November 1984. For supplementary benefit, the rates increase by £9·60 (from 26 November) for each child under 11 and £13·70 or £14·35 respectively for each child aged 11 to 15.

Housing benefit may also be payable to assist with rent and rates: supplementary benefit recipients would generally have these housing costs met in full; for other claimants the amount of help would depend on the level of their rent and rates, the size and composition of the household and the amount of other income.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Neale asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he intends to make changes in the housing benefit scheme.

Mr. Newton: After the changes announced earlier in the year—including the high rent scheme changes—the Government do not intend to make any changes of substance in the housing benefit scheme pending the outcome of the independent review of the scheme.

The November changes include a special increase of 50p in the child's needs allowance which, with the normal up-rating increase, will raise it from £11·95 to £12·85 and make it a higher proportion of a married couple's basic needs allowance than ever before; but we will not be proceeding in advance of the review with the further increase of £1 previously proposed for April 1985.

We are, however, proposing to close an unintended loophole in the Housing Benefit Regulations which allows a grown-up son or daughter living at home to receive a rent allowance for the rent element of any board and lodging payment made to his or her parents. People living in their family's household have never been regarded as having any liability for rent or rates in their own right; and neither housing benefit nor the earlier rent allowance scheme were intended to give help with payments made by non-dependents for their keep. We are consulting the local authority associations and the Social Security Advisory Committee about amending regulations my right hon. Friend intends to lay before the House in the near future to remedy this defect.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) in what circumstances housing benefit supplement can be backdated to 1 April 1983;

(2) if he has any information on the backlog at local authorities and offices of his Department of unidentified housing benefit supplement cases.

Mr. Newton: Housing benefit supplement is a special payment of supplementary benefit and in order to qualify for it a person must first claim supplementary benefit. If a person fails to qualify for supplementary benefit because his income exceeds his supplementary benefit requirements the local DHSS Office automatically notifies the local authority of the amount in excess. The local authority then pay housing benefit supplement to meet the difference between the excess income and the amount of rent and rates not met by normal housing benefit.

I am not aware of any backlog of claims awaiting action by either local authorities or local offices.

Housing benefit supplement will only be backdated to 1 April 1983 if the claimant can show that he had good cause for his failure to make an earlier claim for supplementary benefit.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the estimated take-up of housing benefit supplement.

Mr. Newton: Information on the take-up of housing benefit supplement is not available.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people are estimated to be eligible for housing benefit supplement.

Mr. Newton: The Department estimated in 1983 that about 460,000 claimants then receiving rent rebate and allowance and rate rebate or supplementary benefit would be eligible for housing benefit supplement.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list his powers and responsibilities regarding the identification of those eligible for the compensatory benefit housing benefit supplement.

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend has no specific legal powers or responsibilities in this area. However, a supplementary benefit claimant who fails, or ceases on income grounds to qualify for supplementary benefit, but otherwise meets the conditions of entitlement, is automatically sent a claim form for standard housing benefit. The form indicates the amount by which the claimant's income exceeds his assessed supplementary benefit requirements; this enables the local authority to calculate housing benefit supplement entitlement. The Department has also issued guidelines which enable local authorities to identify most claimants over pensionable age entitled to supplementary benefit or housing benefit supplement.

Residential Nursing Homes

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) who will have access to the list of those de-registered as proprietors of residential nursing homes;

(2) if he will include in the list of individuals who have been de-registered as proprietors of residential care homes an indication of those people who have worked in those homes;

(3) if he will include in a list of those persons who have been de-registered as proprietors of residential homes those people who as individuals have been deemed unfit to work in such homes;

(4) if information on people de-registered as proprietors of residential homes, those who worked in such homes and those deemed unfit to work in such homes will be collected centrally;

(5) if he will put a register of those de-registered as proprietors of residential care homes, those deemed unfit to work in residential care homes and those who have worked in de-registered residential care homes on computer and make immediate access to the information available to local authorities;

(6) how frequently he intends that a list of those individuals who have been de-registered as proprietors of residential care homes will be updated;

(7) what information he will include in the list of individuals who have been de-registered as proporietors of residential care homes;

(8) if he will publish details of his plans to establish a list of individuals who have been de-registered as proprietors of residential care homes.

Mr. John Patten: Information about the national list of cancelled homes registrations and its operation was set out for local authorities in the guidance notes forwarded with local authority circular LAC(84)15 and for district health authorities in health circular HC(84)21; copies of both of which are in the Library. The list will be issued quarterly from next April to registration authorities. It will be prepared by a computer and the Department would be prepared to consider a proposal from any authority that wished to arrange access to the computer. Apart from information held under the children's consultancy service, it is not proposed to collect centrally information about the staff of homes in relation to which a registration has been cancelled.

Board and Lodging Payment

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will increase the meals allowance element in the board and lodging payment in line with the recent increase in the supplementary benefit meals allowance.

Mr. Newton: Boarders who claim supplementary benefit are eligible for an amount to enable them to meet the cost of their board, and to meals allowances for any meals that are not provided, subject to a locally determined limit which is intended to reflect a reasonable charge for full board and lodging in the area concerned.

If a charge for full board is increased to reflect an increase in the cost of meals, the supplementary benefit payable can also be increased provided that the total charge remains within the local limit. Similarly, when the meals allowances are uprated on 26 November, claimants with part board will receive this increase provided that the total of their charge and the meals allowances remains within the local limit.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what were the average numbers of weekly payments for board and lodgings in Scotland since 1980 for tiers i, ii and iii;

(2) what were the average numbers of weekly payments for board and lodgings in Scotland for each individual tier for November to March 1980 to 1984 and April to September 1984.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have the available data as soon as possible.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many supplementary benefit appeals have been heard in Scotland on the subject of furniture grants since 1980; and what was the outcome in each case.

Mr. Newton: The information available is as follows:

*Appeals relating to claims for single payments for household expenses**

Year	*Number of appeals heard*	*Number of successful appeals*
1980†	2,966	941
1981	1,485	408
1982	1,152	253
1983	1,726	428

* The description "household expenses" includes items such as carpets, curtains and crockery.

† Statistics for 1980 relate only to the total number of appeals about exceptional needs payments (now known as single payments.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will update to the latest date for which figures are available his answer on 30 June 1983, *Official Report*, column *141*, information on the total number of

single payments made; and if he will produce a table showing a breakdown of these figures by items covered and by type of claimant.

Mr. Newton: The information given by my hon. Friend, the Member for Brent, North (Dr. Boyson) in his reply to the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) on 30 June 1983 at column *141-42* was obtained from the "Annual Statistical Enquiries" for 1981 and 1982. Comparable figures from the 1983 enquiry are not yet available. However, the final figures for 1982, including a breakdown of payments made by items covered and by type of claimant, are given in tables 19.2 and 19.3 of the "Annual Statistical Enquiry 1982", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many single payments were made for clothes in the latest year for which figures are now available; and what was the average payment.

Mr. Newton: According to the "Annual Statistical Enquiry" conducted in December 1982, about 75,000 single payments of supplementary benefit were made for clothing and footwear in 1982 — the latest year for which figures are available. The average payment was about £39. Because the figures relate to single payments made during the 12 months preceding the date of the enquiry to people still in receipt of supplementary benefit at the time if the enquiry, they are an under estimate of the total number of single payments made during the year.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the annual savings in public spending in *(a)* benefit year 1983-84 and *(b)* benefit year 1984-85 if all claimants of supplementary benefit were on the short-term rate.

Mr. Newton: The estimates requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sickle Cell Anaemia

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to introduce screening for sickle cell anaemia as a matter of routine post natal testing.

Mr. John Patten: We fully accept the need for screening facilities but the local organisation of a screening programme must be a matter for individual health authorities.

Social Security Reviews

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will make a statement of the next stages of the work of the social security review teams following the public hearings;

(2) if he will publish a list of the Government Departments which have given evidence or made representations to the social security reviews, either to individual review teams or to the reviews generally;

(3) if he will list the Departments represented on the social security review teams;

(4) how many meetings, in addition to the formal hearings, have been held by each of the social security review teams;

(5) if he will list the names and numbers of advisers from outside Government, and civil servants from outside the Department of Health and Social Security, who are engaged in work for the social security reviews.

Mr. Fowler: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Doctors (Prescriptions)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the numbers of items prescribed by doctors which are not dispensed over the last recently-available period.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will conduct a survey into the reasons why items prescribed by doctors are not dispensed by chemists.

Mr. John Patten: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the proportion of items prescribed by doctors which cost less than £1.80.

Mr. John Patten: The precise information requested is not available. However, in England in 1983, the latest year for which information is available, 40·9 per cent. of prescriptions written by general practitioners and dispensed by chemists and appliance contractors had a net ingredient cost of less than £1.50. A further 9·1 per cent. had a net ingredient cost between £1.50 and £1.99.

Supplementary Pensions

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many pensioners would cease to be entitled to supplementary pensions if *(a)* additional requirements for heating and *(b)* other additional requirements were abolished.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

"Social Security Statistics"

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will update table 34.45 of the "Social Security Statistics" to the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will update for 1983, or the latest date for which figures are now available, table 34/97 of the "Social Security Statistics".

Mr. Newton: The information requested is as follows:

Year	All Payments		Pensioners		Payments to Unemployed		Others	
	Thousands	Average Amount £	Thousands	Average Amount £	Thousands	Average Amount £	Thousands	Average Amount £
1983	*1,890	75·64	188	62·33	976	76·00	728	78·59

*Rounded to nearest 10,000.

This information was obtained from the 100 per cent. count management statistics.

Child Benefit

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what would be the annual savings in child benefit if the full rate were restricted to families whose joint income is less than £120 a week and if a taper of *(a)* 10 per cent., *(b)* 20 per cent., *(c)* 30 per cent., and *(d)* 50 per cent., were introduced above that figure; and if he will publish a table showing how many families would lose (i) £1 or less, (ii) £1-£2, (iii) £2-£3 and (iv) £3 or more weekly;

(2) what would be the annual savings in child benefit if the full rate were restricted to families whose joint income is less than £180 a week and if a taper of *(a)* 10 per cent., *(b)* 20 per cent., *(c)* 30 per cent., and *(d)* 50 per cent., were introduced above that figure; and if he will publish a table showing how many families would lose (i) £1 or less, (ii) £1-£2, (iii) £2-£3 and (iv) £3 or more weekly

Mr. Newton: This information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Residence Test

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he intends to amend the residence test for pensioners over the age of 80 years.

Mr. Newton: An amendment to the Social Security (Widow's Benefit and Retirement Pensions) Regulations was laid before the House on 5 November. The amending regulations provide that with effect from 26 November 1984 periods of residence in Great Britain after age 80 may be taken into account for satisfaction of the 10 years residence test for non-contributory retirement pension. The amending regulations also provide that a person who failed to satisfy the former residence condition may have his entitlement reconsidered under the new condition from 26 November. Arrangements will be made as soon as possible to identify those existing pensioners who may qualify under the new arrangements and local social security offices will be pleased to deal with individual inquiries from potential beneficiaries.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Children (Custody Jurisdiction)

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice or assistance his Department provides to parents whose children have been taken from their custody to locations beyond the jurisdiction of United Kingdom courts.

Mr. Renton: Parents are advised that in the absence of any amicable settlement their only recourse is to take legal advice in the country where the children have been taken. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has instructed its consular posts to give whatever useful help they can to parents who face problems of this kind. This may include providing lists of local lawyers, trying to obtain welfare reports, assisting in connection with access to the children, drawing the attention of the authorities to any British court orders affecting the children, approaching the local authorities to help in tracing abducted minors and doing what they properly can to bring about a speedy conclusion of any legal proceedings dealing with a child's custody.

BBC External Services

Mr. Merlyn Rees asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he proposes to take to report to Parliament on the proceedings and conclusions of the committee of inquiry into aspects of the external services of the BBC.

Mr. Renton: The report of the team appointed to review the BBC external services was submitted simultaneously to my right hon. and learned Friend and to the chairman of the BBC's board of governors, at whose invitation the review was made, on 9 November. They are considering action on it.

Turkey

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has made any representations to the Turkish Government concerning their incursions into Iraqi territories.

Mr. Renton: We understand that the Turkish operations were conducted in hot pursuit of armed groups which had been responsible for the recent deaths of at least 18 members of the Turkish armed forces. As the Turks have acted with the prior agreement and approval of the Iraqi Government, we do not think there are any grounds on which we can intervene in what is essentially an agreed policy of two sovereign states.

North Korea

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why the United Kingdom does not recognise North Korea as a state.

Mr. Luce: There are exceptional circumstances in Korea, arising in part from the involvement of the United Nations in the Korean question, which leads this Government, along with all previous Governments, to the view that recognition of North Korea as a state would not be appropriate.

EEC (Budget Discipline)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the latest European Economic Community text based on the principles of budget discipline agreed by the European Council.

Mr. Rifkind: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 15 November at column 350, to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples). A copy of the text of the Council's common position on budgetary discipline has now been placed in the Library of the House.

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SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 67**

SESSION 1984-85

6th November—16th November 1984

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

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Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speakers ruling and statement'.

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Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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